

Ice Fury

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Summary: A year after Elsa's coronation, Arendelle is once again covered in snow overnight. The Snow Queen could be the first suspect, but there's something different about this mysterious winter weather. Elsa is determined to find its source, but in doing so, she will not only meet a kindred spirit but also find herself in the middle of a terrible war. [ON TEMPORARY HIATUS]

1. Prologue: Snow

****A/N:** Hi everyone! I promise I'll keep author's notes to a minimum, but I do need to write this one before we get started to clarify a few things.**

****First,** this story takes place a year after Frozen and about two years after How To Train Your Dragon. In this storyline, the events of Frozen happened in parallel with episode 14 of Dragons: Defenders of Berk (also titled "Frozen"), and thus, Elsa's "eternal winter" also reached Berk for some time before the Great Thaw, after which Berk was also freed from the crazy weather. I'm basing this on Anna's statement to Elsa while in the Ice Palace ("You kind of set off an eternal winter everywhere").**

****Second,** I am not touching the already established pairings of both movies (sorry, HicElsa shippers). I actually find Hicstrid quite lovely, and anyways, they're not really making much of an appearance in this story. Besides, I am a hardcore Jelsa shipper, so I really can't picture Elsa with anyone else other than Jack Frost. By now, I imagine some of you may already be confused by what I meant with "a kindred spirit" in the summary. Just wait and keep reading; I believe you'll like it (SPOILER ALERT: it's not a human at all).**

****Third,** this story will be divided into two parts, but they will both be within the same fic. The first one will be updated regularly; the second one, however, won't come out until after How To Train

Your Dragon 2_ is released in a month. This obviously means that if you haven't seen HTTYD2 by the time I begin writing the second part of this story, you'll be completely spoiled, so I strongly suggest that you wait until you've seen the movie to keep reading this fic in order to avoid spoilers. I will let you know when the first part is complete.**

That's all for now. Enjoy!

Disclaimer: I don't own **_Frozen_ or _How To Train Your Dragon_.**

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><p>A soft rain started to fall all over the kingdom of Arendelle, forcing those of its citizens who were either in the market or in the docks to seek shelter wherever they could. Some kids, however, were already playing outside, soaking themselves in newly-formed puddles and ignoring their parents' warnings about catching a cold until the parents had no other choice but to bring the children inside their homes themselves. The ships that were still out in the open seas were already turning around to go back to the safety of the fjord before the weather could get any worse.<p>

More and more raindrops began hitting the windows of every house and building, including the castle. Most people tended to ignore it and just go on with their activities, but not Elsa. She actually enjoyed the rhythmic sound, finding it quite relaxing. Leaning on the windowsill, her eyes danced between the falling drops, following them as they reached the bottom of the glass. Her mind was suddenly free of all worries as she focused on the movement of the water. Then, melancholy took over.

Of course the rain often reminded her of the storm in which her parents' ship had perished, and most times the thought even made her shed some tears. But then she would think of their faces as they told her those last words: "You'll be fine, Elsa." They had trusted and believed in her when they left, and she knew they would be proud of her now. After everything she'd gone through, she had finally learned how to control her powers and unleash the beauty of it, all thanks to her sister's love. Now she also was a great and benevolent queen, loved by everyone in her kingdom just as much as she loved them. At least so Anna kept telling her.

She and Kristoff, along with Sven and Olaf, were visiting Kristoff's family of trolls and wouldn't be returning until the next day. Elsa felt glad that her sister had not only found a man who loved her with all his heart but that they were also taking their time to let their relationship grow and become stronger before even thinking of marriage. Still, the time would come when they _would_ marry, and nothing would make her happier than to be there for her sister's wedding. As for Elsa, she really wasn't considering marriage on a short-term. For the moment, she didn't want nor need a husband to rule Arendelle, even if her advisors kept telling her that she had to keep up with the tradition. Perhaps one day in the future, but not now. She had other things to care about.

"Your Majesty?" a voice called from the threshold of her room, making Elsa leap as she realized she'd started to doze off leaning against her window.

"Yes, Gerda?" she replied, rubbing her eyes.

"Perhaps you should take the rest of the day off, Your Highness."

Elsa smiled. Gerda always had a way of telling her so much with such few words. During the last week, she had been very busy planning how to celebrate the anniversary of her coronation, which was only three days away. Now she was exhausted, but at least everything was ready. Truth be told, she probably wouldn't have done so had it not been for Anna's insistence to "throw a big party" for everyone. Her sister had even offered to prepare everything, but in the end Elsa had warmed to the idea of doing it herself. Her ideas ranged from making a ball to making a great picnic within the castle's walls to organizing a massive snowball fight. In the end, she had opted for the latter, thinking everyone would have a lot of fun. Yeah, maybe Anna's enthusiasm was rubbing off on her.

"Yeah, maybe I will. Thank you, Gerda."

The maid bowed and left, closing the door behind her. Elsa made use of her powers to change her dress into a nightgown, and then she slipped under the sheets and let her head rest on the soft pillows. She considered the possibility of taking an entire week off at her Ice Palace once the anniversary celebration was over. It wouldn't be the first time she returned there since the incident, but still, it had been at least three months since her last visit and she kind of missed Marshmallow. Perhaps Olaf would like to come as well.

Before she knew it, Elsa had already fallen asleep to the sound of raindrops falling on her window.

* * *

><p>Day became night without anyone noticing it through the thick layer of gray clouds. The rain kept falling until well after midnight, when the raindrops suddenly became snowflakes that quickly covered the entire kingdom. Had anyone in Arendelle been staring at the top of the North Mountain, that person would've been able to see several white-blue glowing balls of ice streaking across the sky from its peak. From that distance, however, no one would've been able to hear the mighty roar that pierced the night like thunder.<p>

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><p>"Elsa! Please, wake up!"<p>

Elsa forced her eyes open as she heard her sister's desperate voice. "Anna? What's happening?"

"I don't know! You tell me!"

"What?"

"Did you do it? Just tell me. You know I won't judge you."

This was getting ridiculous. "Anna, seriously, what are you talking about?"

Anna suddenly fell silent for a moment. "You really don't know what's going on?"

"No, and I'd really appreciate it if you told me."

Anna gestured at the window. "See for yourself."

Elsa had no other choice but to get out of the bed and walk towards the window. And as soon as she stared outside, she understood why her sister was so distressed. Everything she saw was covered in white.

She was speechless while she tried thinking of anything that could've caused her to lose control of her powers like this during her sleep—for there could be no other explanation for this weather. But the more she thought of it, the more baffled she was. Why would her emotions get out of control at all? It wasn't as if she'd been building up any kind of stress that would've been released overnight. Moreover, not even before she learned how to control her powers had something like this happened.

"Um, Elsa?" Anna said. "I imagine there's a lot going on in your mind now, and I don't want to worry you even more, but—"

She hesitated, so Elsa turned to look into her sister's eyes. She didn't say a word; she just gave her a slight yet reassuring smile as she placed a hand on Anna's shoulder. Eventually, Anna continued. "Kristoff and I were on our way back this morning when we saw —" Her quivery voice trailed off, and it took her another moment to regain her composure. "It looked like an army or armies, I don't know. They all looked like soldiers but they weren't wearing the same uniforms. They were marching this way on the Northern Road."

Elsa tried as hard as she could not to feel anxious about this. "Maybe they're just passing by and—"

Anna immediately shook her head. "They're coming for you," she said, and before Elsa could ask, she added, "Olaf jumped out of the sled before we could stop him. He ran and hid behind a tree on the side of the road, and then he came back in a hurry and told us that he'd overheard some of the soldiers talking among them and saying something about 'slaying the ice monster'." By now, Anna was stuttering and tears were clouding her eyes. "We had to leave the sled behind so that Sven could take a shortcut through the woods and take us all here as quickly as possible. We had to warn you."

Elsa embraced Anna who started to cry on her shoulder. She understood her sister's fear because it was something Elsa herself had feared would happen ever since her secret became known. The people of Arendelle had been more comprehending about her powers, but not everyone would feel the same way.

So maybe this subconscious fear had been the cause of this snowfall. It certainly was the reason why snow was now falling inside the room. However, part of her had known full well that this day could come and was ready for it. She quickly planned her course of action; then, she took a deep breath to calm herself, and the snowflakes ceased.

"Anna, listen to me," she spoke softly into her sister's ear. "Everything is going to be fine, okay?" She recalled once again her father's last words of comfort to her. "We'll be fine. But I need you to stay calm and trust me on this, alright?"

Anna nodded into her shoulder, and once Elsa felt certain that her sister had calmed down, she let go of her. She conjured her queenly outfit and left the room with Anna trailing closely behind. She made her way outside to the courtyard's open gates where Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf were all in wait. Beyond the city limits, a black column of people on the road stood out among its white surroundings.

"Those are the soldiers you saw?" Elsa asked Kristoff.

"Yes. I counted about two hundred armed men."

"Close the door behind me," she told him firmly as she started to walk forward.

"What?" Anna shrieked. "Elsa, you can't be consideringâ€" "

"Anna," Elsa cut her sister off, this time placing both hands on her shoulders, "Remember what I told you. We'll be fine. Trust me."

And trying to look as confident as possible, she walked outside and stood in the middle of the narrow bridge that linked the castle with the rest of the village, not even turning back to see when the gates were closed. The small army was getting closer, But Elsa remained calm, breathing deeply and going over the names of the people she loved the most and the reasons why she loved them in her mind. Her plan was simple; she would prove to these people that she was not a monster by unfreezing the fjord and melting theâ€"

The fjord. She hadn't noticed it until now, but it wasn't frozen. Had this been her doing, chances were the water would've instantly turned to ice. Also, the snow seemed to be melting where the few rays of sunshine that managed to pierce the cloudy sky touched the ground. Therefore, this maybe was not her fault after all.

The soldiers wouldn't know that, though, so she still would still need to carry out her plan and thaw everything to prove that she meant no harm for anyone. But first, she would make use of diplomacy. Thus, when the army finally reached the bridge, she called out, "Greetings, and welcome to Arendelle. I am Queen Elsa."

"The Snow Queen," the man leading the army said before Elsa could continue. "We know who you are, and we are glad that you have come to meet us here."

The man's words sounded somewhat menacing, so Elsa felt surprised when the soldiers bowed before her. The leader came forward and said, "I am Captain Sigurd, at your service."

Elsa didn't fail to notice that Sigurd had not mentioned his country of origin. "What is your purpose here, Captain Sigurd, may I ask?"

"We've come here to warn you of an impending threat to your kingdom, Your Highness," Sigurd replied, "and to hunt it down."

"A threat?" Elsa repeated.

"A beast," Sigurd said. "A nightmarish creature unlike anything you've ever seen before, capable of freezing everything and anyone in its path. We call it the ice monster."

* * *

><p>AN: Not my best first chapter (especially the ending), but please give it a try. It'll be worth it, you'll see.**

Don't forget to review on your way out!

2. The Ice Monster

"Soâ€| you're absolutely certain that they're _not_ coming after you?"

Elsa chuckled. "Yes, Anna, I'm certain. They're hunting some_thing_, not some_one_."

After what had felt like an eternity for Anna, Elsa had finally told Kristoff to reopen the gates and let her back in a few hours ago. Relieved to see her safe and sound, Anna would've embraced her sister then and there, but the shock of seeing an army march unhindered into the castle's courtyard wouldn't let her. Elsa had asked Kristoff to make sure that the soldiers were properly taken care of, and then she had told Anna to follow her back inside the castle. She then explained what the soldiers' business in Arendelle was and that she'd come to an agreement with the army's leaderâ€"a guy with black hair and sideburns called Sigurdâ€"to let his men stay within the castle's walls.

Now, Anna was contemplating the courtyard from her sister's window. Where that very morning there had been nothing but snow, there were now tents and small campfires all over the place. She was still not entirely convinced of what these people said they were doing here, but she took her sister's word for it.

"Alright, they're hunting a monster. Did Sideburns tell you anything else?"

"Captain Sigurd, Anna."

"Whatever."

"Oh, come on. Not every guy with sideburns is evil."

"If you say so."

Elsa shook her head in disbelief as she chuckled again. "Yes, he told me a few things. He's still reluctant to reveal the name of his place of origin, but he claims to be from the first northern kingdom to be raided by the ice monster. He's been chasing it ever since, following its path of destruction. His army is actually a collection of soldiers from every other kingdom he's been at during his quest to kill the beast, including Weaseltownâ€"I mean, Weselton."

Anna giggled at the mention of Weselton, but then she considered a

possibility. "Those two thugs that tried to kill you last year wouldn't happen to be part of Sideburns'â€"Sigurd's army, would they?"

"Actually, I've already run into them," Elsa replied nonchalantly. "Let's just say that I gave them anâ€" icy stare. Only as a friendly reminder of what I can do."

Anna was surprised to hearing her sister make fun of her own powers. This was progress. She began laughing at the thought of those two faces, though her laughter was also one of joy for Elsa's new attitude. Elsa didn't join in the laughter; she simply smirked.

Kristoff chose that moment to rejoin them. "All of the soldiers have settled in. They're resting now," he announced.

"Thank you, Kristoff," Elsa replied. "And thank you as well for looking after my sister."

"I'm just glad things went well," he said as he placed his right arm around Anna's waist. She in turn leaned her head on his shoulder. It made her feel so secure, especially at times of severe distressâ€"like earlier that day. He had always been there for her, even before they'd both realized their feelings for each other. She was still thankful with the trolls for their part in that.

She was also glad that Elsa had accepted their relationship to the point where he had even become like a brother to her. He was obliged to address her as 'Your Majesty' in public, but whenever it was only the three of themâ€"or the five of them, if one were to include Olaf and Svenâ€"Elsa always insisted that he call her by her name or at least lose the royal title. He was like family, after all.

Suddenly, Anna's thoughts went in another direction. "What do you think the monster looks like?" she wondered out loud.

"I heard a few of the soldiers say that it's 20 feet tall and has arms like trees," Elsa said.

"That's not what I heard," Kristoff said. He let go of Anna and began gesturing with his hands like he was telling a horror story as he continued. "They say it's like a ghost or wraith conjures the coldest mist and manifests itself within it as a shadow with piercing blue eyes that can freeze the soul of anyone unfortunate enough to stare into them."

Anna looked at him seriously. "That doesn't sound very logic. Elsa said that the monster raids villages for food, and ghosts don't feed on normal food. They don't eat at all, in fact."

"I'm just saying, that's what some of the soldiers think," Kristoff replied, raising both palms up in self-defense.

"Some of those soldiers are new to this quest and very gullible too," another voice said behind their backs, making all three of them turn around in surprise. It was Sigurd. "Forgive my intrusion, Your Highness."

"How dare you walk into the Queen'sâ€" " Anna began, but Elsa raised

her hand to stop her.

"I granted you and your men a safe place to rest within the castle's walls, Captain," she said calmly yet authoritatively. "Don't abuse of my hospitality."

"I simply wanted to be sure that you had followed my advice."

"My messengers are spreading the word as we speak. The entire kingdom will be on curfew until you tell me that the menace is gone."

"What?" Anna asked disbelievingly. "A curfew?"

"It's just for a few days, Princess," Sigurd said.

"B-b-but the anniversary celebration!" Anna stuttered. "We can't cancel it. Elsa!"

"We're not cancelling it, we're just postponing it," Elsa reassured her. Anna wasn't pleased with this, though. Sideburns had just arrived and he'd already convinced Elsa to let his men inside the castle and forced her to establish a curfew and delay the event she'd spent so many days preparing for. What was next, a coup? She narrowed her eyes at Sigurd and for a moment wished she had her sister's powers so that he could freeze the man where he stood.

"If you had seen what I've seen, you would be doing the same," Sigurd alleged. "You have no idea of what this creature is capable of. This is no ordinary creature, even though it's not anything like what some of my men wildly imagine it to be either."

"Have you seen it?" Anna challenged.

"Not once. That's what makes it dangerous."

"But how can you know?"

"Because I've been hunting it without rest for nearly a year!" Sigurd replied exasperatedly. Then, realizing that he'd just lost his temper in front of royalty, he regained his composure and continued. "I have learned how it works—how it thinks. It is smart, extremely smart. It knows how to remain concealed and makes use of the elements to that end. During the winter, it tended to raid villages more freely during the day and the night, and no one was ever able to see it, so I believe that its skin is as white as the snow it blends into. In the last few months, however, with the winter gone, it has had to improvise. Last night it rained, so all it had to do was to turn that rain into snow."

"Yeah, how did it do that, by the way?" Kristoff asked.

"I don't know how it makes ice, but I do know that it cannot make a lot of it at once. That's why it has been taking advantage of rain clouds. It literally shoots its ice at the clouds to freeze the water, sometimes two or three days in a row if the weather favors it. Then, and only then, it strikes."

"With the freshly fallen snow as cover," Elsa said, nodding in understanding.

"Precisely. If the weather becomes warm enough to turn the snow into mist, it will use it as a smokescreen to move freely, but is also able to create its own icy mist if needed be. If for some reason it feels threatened regardless, it casts a shadow against the mist to appear even more menacing than what it is, but that's just a trick. But if anyone underestimates it and tries to get too close to it, wellâ€¦" Sigurd made a dramatic pause before concluding. "All you need to know is that I've seen enough people lose limbs because of its ice for a lifetime, and yet none of them have been able to see it clearly."

"That doesn't sound very encouraging," Kristoff said. "How can you hope to kill it if you can't even see it?"

"Oh, we'll see it eventually," Sigurd said confidently. "The only reason why it doesn't stay in a single place for long is because the weather doesn't always favor him, and so it's forced to look for another place to raid. And for all its intelligence, it's made a big mistake. It keeps fleeing south. Soon, not even his little tricks will be able to help it."

"The warm weather will melt its ice and snow faster than he can replace it," Elsa said matter-of-factly.

"Yes. For now, it will be better if everyone gathers supplies and remains indoors. Let it scavenge whatever it can from the market and the docks. Then it will move on, and so will I."

"And you'll eventually catch up with it and slay it, and you'll return home crowned in glory," Anna said sarcastically.

"I'm not doing this for glory, nor do any of my men. We just want to stop this scourge from harming anyone else, that's all."

"Yeah, right," Anna rolled her eyes.

"Think of me as you will, Princess. I'm not here to please any of you." Then he said to Elsa, "Just consider what's best for your people." And without any other word, he left.

"Was such hostility really necessary, Anna?" Elsa asked her once Sigurd was gone.

"I don't like him, Elsa."

"Neither do I, but I can't risk sending him away only for his assertions to become true. He has a lot more manpower than we do, and if this monster does strike, I'd rather have these people here to defend us. Besides, if what he says is true, then all we have to do is to put up with him for a few days. He'll leave soon, chasing the beast, and things in Arendelle will be back to normal."

"You just said it. If what he says is true." Elsa raised an eyebrow at Anna. "Oh, come on. Don't tell me you don't feel like he's hiding something."

Elsa simply stared down and didn't reply.

* * *

><p>Two nights later, a slim figure moved cautiously towards the docks, careful not to let her clothes get stuck into anything. She didn't want to be found out here at all, since she was purposely violating the curfew, and all because of a sudden whim. How could staying indoors be this boring? She scoffed at herself; in the past, she was too worried to care about finding ways to entertain herself, but now she had run out of options to keep her mind busy during her spare time. If she had to be honest with herself, though, part of her simply couldn't shake the idea of being the first one to see something more than just a mirage.<p>

She wanted to see the creature with her own eyes.

Her hopes of remaining unseen faded away when she bumped into a pair of small shapes that let out a small shriek as they fell to the ground.

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed in a whisper, barely able to keep her own balance. "Are you okay?"

Rubbing her head, one of the kids sat up, and her eyes beamed. "Queen Elsa!" she yelled then turned to her young companion and told him excitedly, "It's the Queen! It's the Queen!"

"Shhh!" Elsa desperately tried to hush the girl. She seemed to understand quickly enough and took both hands to her lips to keep herself from yelling any more, an innocent smile drawn across her face.

"What are you doing here, Your Majesty?" the girl's companion asked.

"What are you doing here?" Elsa countered. "You should be in bed."

"We wanted to see the ice monster," the boy replied, much to Elsa's surprise. All she had made publicly known was that the soldiers had come to fight a terrible menace to the kingdom and that it would be safer to stay indoors. So the rumors of what exactly was going on had spread across Arendelle already.

"Why?" Elsa asked the children, amazed by their braveness in spite of everything. "Aren't you afraid of it?"

"Aren't you?" the boy replied.

"I can defend myself if needed be. You, however, could be in grave danger." She wasn't scolding them, but her tone was serious enough that they would understand that this was not a children's game.

"We just wanted to help it," the girl said in disappointment, lowering her head. Elsa raised an eyebrow.

"Help it?"

"To be good again. Just like your sister helped you."

Elsa couldn't help but to be moved by this little girl's innocent point of view, but her words also reflected her own thoughts. That

was the reason why she was here, too.

Thus far, things had come to pass the way Sigurd has said they would. In the last two days, rain had turned into snow that had added to the first layer which had almost completely melted by then even though the sun had remained hidden behind the clouds all this time. Today, however, the sky had started to clear up shortly after dusk, and the warmth of this summer night was turning the snow into a thick icy mist. The monster would undoubtedly appear tonight.

But what if it wasn't a monster?

She had been born with her powers, but it was possible that this 'creature' had been cursed—a man or woman turned into a beast with ice powers. It was the only explanation for its intelligence and ability to adapt. Maybe all it was trying to do was to find a way to break the curse. Such had been Elsa's thoughts as she had slipped away from the castle a while ago, walking on the water to get around it and into the fjord and thawing the leftover ice trail to make sure that no one found her here. She sighed.

"Okay, you can help, but only if you promise to find a place to hide and stay there if things go awry," she told the kids. The girl recovered her bright smile and nearly began jumping all over the place, but Elsa gesture for her to remain still. "And be quiet."

The girl nodded in approval. "So, where can we wait for it?"

Elsa began looking around. She spotted a warehouse with plenty of barrels to provide cover. "We can wait there. Come with me."

Both kids took her by the hand and followed her. Crouching behind a cluster of barrels close to the entrance, the girl suddenly took a hand to her nose. "What's that smell?"

"It's fish," the boy said. "I think this is where they keep the fish."

That wasn't good. If they could smell it, so would the creature. This was the worst place to be. "Okay, change of plans. Let's go find another place to hide."

Both children nodded, but then they heard a growl at the entrance to the warehouse. Elsa motioned for the kids to stay down, and then she peek over the barrel to see a shadow moving within the mist and into the building. It appeared to be walking on all fours and didn't seem to be too big. She crouched again and waited, listening closely, hoping that it would move past them and scavenge some of the other barrels. The mist only seemed to get thicker by the minute, until suddenly she heard something to her left side. All three of them turned to look that way and were met by a pair of blue, glowing eyes.

The eyes of a hungry predator.

* * *

><p>Don't forget to review on your way out!

3. Blue Eyes

Elsa was hoping against all hope that the creature hadn't yet realized that they were there.

The mist was displaced a few times as the beast sniffed the air then puffed. She could swear she was seeing teeth behind the mist, right below those blue eyes, but that could just as well be a fear-induced figment of her imagination. The eyes, however, were as real as the two kids beside her. They reminded her of a feline gaze—fierce and piercing and capable to look right into one's very soul. No wonder there were such wild stories among Sigurd's soldiers.

The girl suddenly stirred, and the creature's gaze became fixed on her. It hissed; out of hunger or anger, Elsa didn't know nor cared. Her mind was too busy right now, going over any and all possible choices of defense and trying to determine which one would be the best. She could try freezing the creature's feet, and then make a run for it with the children—if only she could see it. But in order to see it, she would have to lift the mist, which could turn out to be the last thing she ever did if she tried. She had no way of knowing how fast the creature was. Another option was to create a sphere of thick ice around her and the children and wait until the beast decided to leave them alone. But if it was capable of creating ice, could it also thaw it at will?

Despite the fact that she had considered all of this in less than three seconds, in that time the girl had already crawled closer to the creature's face without Elsa even noticing it until it was too late. Or so she thought.

"Don't worry, mister ice monster," the girl said. "We don't want to hurt you. We just want to help you be good again."

"Kat, careful," the boy cautioned.

But the girl wouldn't listen. She lifted an open palm and said, "You don't have to be bad anymore. Let us help you."

Elsa was slowly moving her own hand towards the girl—Kat—, ready to pull her out of harm's way in a moment's notice and hoping that the creature wouldn't get to her faster. She was greatly surprised when the beast's eyes—and thus its face—began darting back and forth between the girl and the fish barrels behind her. Its expression softened and became a mixture of desperation and indecision, almost as if it was torn between feeding at all costs and sparing the children.

Was that a sense of morality behind the façade of a devilish being?

Then, without warning, the creature stood on his two hind legs and let out a deafening screech. Elsa drew the children closer and wrapped them tightly under her arms, lowering her head and thrusting her shoulders forward in a feeble attempt to use them to cover her ears from the sound. Glancing for a moment at the creature, she thought she saw the outline of a pair of wings?

As soon as it had begun, the screeching stopped, and the creature slipped away. Elsa breathed her relief. The so-called monster was

more than just smart; it had a conscience. It had _chosen_ not to kill them. Maybe she and Kat were right.

Her childlike curiosity took over.

"Stay here, and don't move," she ordered the children. They looked shocked, but they nodded anyway. Satisfied, she stood and walked slowly towards the exit.

As she stepped outside, she was able to make out a paddling sound getting away. She looked at the water and saw the ripples—the kind that that resembled a small boat's wake. The monster was fleeing, but why? And more importantly, to where?

She took a big risk and used her powers to thin the mist, not lifting it entirely but just enough to at least find the silhouette of the beast. Her action bore fruit sooner than expected. There it was, swimming away on some sort of ice slab. Elsa's awe was growing by the minute. This creature couldn't move _through_ the water, but it had devised a way to swim _above_ it and use it as a means to escape. Smart, indeed, and stunningly creative.

The sound of rushing footsteps behind her alerted her of people approaching the docks. She quickly took note of the direction the creature was heading to, and then she thickened the mist again. She rushed back into the warehouse to check up on the children. Kat was still frozen in place, but her cute, bright smile had reappeared by now.

"Queen Elsa, did you see it?" she asked, unable to hide her excitement.

"Yes, Kat, I saw it," Elsa replied, the little girl's smile bringing one to her own face.

"I told you it wasn't bad," she told the boy.

"Hey! Who's there?" a man called from outside.

Elsa was not sure of what to say. In the end, she didn't need to say anything. A few of Sigurd's men, including the Duke of Weselton's bodyguards, entered the warehouse with their weapons at the ready. They all halted when they saw the Queen with a couple of children, just standing there.

"What in the world are you thinking?" Sigurd himself bellowed as he too arrived at the building. "I told you not to engage—" His voice trailed off when he saw Elsa.

So much for a stealthy escapade, she thought.

* * *

><p>Sigurd paced furiously around the castle's throne room, visibly upset. Elsa, standing in front of her throne, watched him with an emotionless expression. "This is outrageous, unacceptable! Exposing yourself and some children to danger like that," he finally said.<p>

"I found the children at the docks. How could I leave them alone? You

should be thankful that I was there toâ€œ"

"No, you should be grateful that the demon didn't see you!"

It did see us_, she thought. It just decided to let us live._

But she wouldn't tell him that. Anna was right; this man was hiding something other than his place of origin. She was starting to wonder whether he had exaggerated some of his accounts during his quest with the purpose of rallying more likeminded bloodthirsty men to hunt down the creature.

For now, she'd have to draw comfort from the fact that the children were safe and sound, although their parents would surely be scolding them at this very moment. She had not let the soldiers take them back home, instead doing it herself. Now she wondered what those parents would think of her. Would they think of her as the Queen who would not abandon two children to their own in the face of danger, or as the Queen who had let them stay with her during her little 'adventure' instead of immediately taking them back?

"That was the most stupid thing I've ever seen," Sigurd kept ranting. "A Queen! A Queen, of all people, thinking that she could do what my men haven't been able to!"

"I could'veâ€œ"

"So, what? You think that because you and that spawn share the same abilities it wouldn't hurt you?"

"I don't need to explain myself to you or anyone else," she argued. "And neither am I here to please you of all people."

"You think I haven't met people who would defy my advice before?! I've seen lots of men die because of their recklessness, but never someone in such a position of authority! What kind of example do you think you can give your subjects when you cannot bring yourself to obey your own decrees? Do you think you are above all that?"

"And who exactly do you think you are to speak to a Queen like that, Captain?" She was getting tired of this guy.

Sigurd began pacing again. "Had you been killed by the beast, this kingdom would've been left without Queen. Did that thought ever cross your mind?"

"I can take of myself. Just ask the two men fromâ€œ" She was cut short by a sword almost slicing her neck.

"Yeah, I can see how well you'd fare in combat, Your Majesty," he spat. He sheathed his sword and began walking towards the exit, but just before he left, he warned, "The monster will return tomorrow night. If you can't stay here for your own good, I will most certainly not be there to save you."

Elsa watched him walk away, anger building up inside of her and manifesting like a flurry of snowflakes swirling around her. She closed her eyes. Conceal, don't feel. Conceal, don't feel._

The snowstorm subdued, but it didn't make Elsa feel any better. If anything, it made her feel more frustrated. She hadn't had the need to use those words in a while, not since she'd learned to use love to control her powers. How could this man have such an effect on her?

She realized that she needed to focus herself in something else, something more productive. Like finding the creature.

She refused to call it a monster anymore. She knew what it was like to be called that. No, it was a creature with intelligence and a complete understanding of right and wrong. It had to have a soul. It had to be something else.

And it had to be hungry.

That gave her an idea. If food was what it was after, the food is what she'd get it.

But first, she needed a new plan.

* * *

><p>AN: Before any of you ask, Elsa is definitely NOT going to fall in love with Sigurd. Just wanted to make that clear.**

**I hope you're all enjoying this story. Now I'm going to do something I haven't done before with my other fic: I'm writing here a reply for each review I've gotten so far.
>

**_Jenson22:_ Thank you; as you can see, I'm trying my best to do so.

>Megaphantom: Thanks!

>RedApple435: I'm glad you like it; I just hope not to disappoint.

>YouNameIt: Ehm... I don't know.

>Guest: Sorry about last night's cliffy; I just had to do it.**

Now, for those of you who haven't reviewed, I just want to say that while I'm not uploading this story to get praises from everyone, it is encouraging and helpful for me (and for every writer) whenever you say something. So, please, if you can leave a review, leave it. I'm trying hard to update every day or at least every two or three days, so please let me know that my work is not in vain.

And for those of you who are also following my other sci-fi fic (TFRR), I'm truly sorry that I haven't updated so far. I detailed the reasons for this in my SG-1 one-shot last Friday. And also, sorry for not replying to your reviews publicly; as you can see, the only reason why I'm actually updating this fic so regularly is because the chapters are way shorter, and besides, by the time I finish writing a chapter for TFRR I'm already so eager to upload it that I don't give myself some time to reply. Still, I promise to leave a nice A/N for all of you when I finish writing it.

I guess that's it. I thank you in advance for your reviews! See you tomorrow!

4. Unexpected

Great. This is starting to feel more like a prison. And it's not even of my own making.

Elsa watched the soldier standing guard right in front of her escape route. It wasn't part of her Royal Guard but of Sigurd's army. So it wasn't enough for him to just yell at her and walk around like he was the king; now he had also placed guards at every exit.

The sun had set an hour ago, which gave Elsa about two to three hours before the creature attacked again to find it. Speed was of the essence, and this minion was slowing her down. He was well aware of everything around him and wouldn't get distracted so easily, so Elsa would have to come up with some other way to get rid of him.

She smirked.

The thin mist that was starting to rise from the ground suddenly became too thick to make out any shape at all. The soldier couldn't see past his own nose, but he felt a presence and knew that there was someone else here. He unsheathed his sword and held it in a defensive position, looking one way then the other, until a hard object impacting on the back of his head knocked him out cold.

Literally. Elsa had hit him with an ice pan. She resisted the urge to laugh out loud. _Oh, dear cousin, how could you come up with such a great idea?_ Of course she knew the story of how her cousin Rapunzel and her husband Eugene had first met, and the part about the frying pan was her favorite. But never in her whole life had she imagined that she'd use the same method to knock out someone, albeit with a pan made out of ice. _Better than freezing this poor guy's heart, I guess._

She turned the ice pan into snow that fell to the ground, and after making sure that the soldier was still breathing and that she had caused no permanent damage, she set the man in such a way that it would appear like he had fallen asleep on the job, sitting in the ground with his knees pulled up to his chest and his arm hugging his bent legs. Then she left, hoping that no other soldier had seen her.

She reached the docks the same way she had the night before and, once certain that the children weren't around this time, she entered the warehouse and picked up one of the fish barrels from the cluster she had used as cover. _Funny_, she thought as she rolled the barrel all the way to where the smaller boats would be, _that Sigurd would go to such lengths to keep _me_ inside the castle but wouldn't risk sending his men outside the gates to defend the village._

Once at her intended destination, and using one of the boats as a template, she created a small ice sailboat with a single mast. Then, she tore a small piece of fabric from the bottom of her ice blue dress and attached it to the mast. She had mastered her little trick of creating any kind of dress with her ice powers, provided that there was at least a small cloth from which to do it, so it wasn't hard for her to create an entire sail out of the torn piece. She even took the time to replace the now missing piece from her dress. Finally, she placed the barrel in the boat and boarded it, and she

conjured a gust of wind to hit the sail and propel the boat away from the fjord.

Hopefully, if anyone on the village or the castle walls had managed to see anything through the mist, they would blame the "monster".

* * *

><p>The journey took a little over an hour. Elsa didn't venture into open seas; she kept sailing along the cliffs to her left, no less than a hundred feet from the shoreline. Her eyes were fixed on the massive walls of rock. This was where the creature had been heading the night before, and everyone in Arendelle knew about the large cave system that ran throughout these cliffsâ€"a perfect place to hide from everyone, other than the mountains. There had to be an entrance to said system somewhere out here.<p>

In any case, if she was unable to find the creature, she had a backup plan. She could wait for it back at the fjord and give it the food before it reached the village proper. She would have to catch its attention somehow, butâ€|

No, she wouldn't. There, halfway to the top of the cliff, was what she was looking for.

The cave entrance.

She maneuvered her boat towards the shore. Finding it to be too narrow for anyone to walk on it, she froze some of the water around the boat into ice, which would not only provide her with a place to stand but also keep the boat in place and prevent it from being carried away by the waves until she returned. The cliff looked like an easy climb, but it would still take her a while to get up there. Thus, she came up with another idea. She picked the fish barrel from the boat and placed it on the ground next to her, and then she summoned a column of ice beneath her feet that rose quickly. In a matter of seconds, she had reached the entrance. The cave itself looked a bit dark but wide enough for her to move freely. She created a small sled in which to place the barrel, and making sure to leave a trail of ice in her wake to allow for the sled to slide easily as she pulled it, she ventured inside.

After a while, the cave became pitch black, the moonlight unable to reach this far into it. Elsa was starting to regret not bringing a lamp. She was forced to stop to allow her eyes to adjust to the dark. When she finally was able to distinguish the tunnel more clearly, she continued.

The cave was damp and cold, just not as chilly as it would probably be during the winter. For someone who wasn't bothered by the cold, Elsa couldn't help the goosebumps. It wasn't because of the cold itself as much as it was from knowing that she was walking into the creature's lair. She had been overly eager to find it, but now she feared that her enthusiasm would cost her life. The ice trail behind her became cracked and covered in frost, reflecting her fear. She stopped once more and began thinking about her kingdom, her subjectsâ€| her family.

Anna.

She wasn't just doing this to satisfy her curiosity. She was doing it out of love, the love she had for all of those people. She had to make sure the creature wouldn't hurt any of them if for some reason it decided to ignore its consciousness and let its instincts take over.

The ice trail became pristine again.

She moved on.

She wasn't sure of how long she'd walked or how much time had passed when she reached an intersection. Where to go now? Even though she knew she was no tracker like the village hunters, she tried to find something that could tell her which tunnel to follow—footprints, fur, scales, anything.

Nothing.

She had two choices now: to wait here until the creature came out, or to pick one of the tunnels and risk it being the wrong one—in which case, she would be unable to get back to the other in time before the creature decided to go back to Arendelle. There had to be a way to at least choose less randomly, some clue to help her figure out—

A low, animalistic rumbling echoed throughout the tunnel to her left. Elsa's heart skipped a beat.

Me and my big mouth, she thought deep inside. There was no going back anymore. Now she knew where it was.

* * *

><p>The chill was starting to become more familiar. It was an
icy chill.

The tunnel suddenly gave way to a large cavern completely covered in ice. It didn't look like her Palace at all. In fact, she could even deduce where the blasts of ice had hit before spreading to the rest of the walls from looking at the icicle clusters everywhere—much in the same way as her own ice had manifested on her coronation day. Aside from that, though, the place looked somewhat cozy, or at least less bleak than the rest of the cave system.

Elsa let go of the sled and moved cautiously inside. Despite the lack of elegance, it seemed like the place had an actual design to it. All but one of the other tunnels—the one she had just left—that led here were blocked by thick ice, probably with icicles shooting out on the other side. The ground was completely covered in snow, possibly to provide the creature with a white background to blend into. The ceiling was littered with stalactites of all sizes, some of them made out of rock, some others made out of ice, some covered in ice, some of them moving—

Wait, what?

Her eyes weren't playing any tricks on her. There was something moving on the biggest ice stalactite, the one hanging in the middle of the cavern. It had to be the creature, though Elsa still couldn't make out an actual shape because of the shadows concealing it. It looked like it was sleeping, so she decided to leave the fish there

and leave while it was still safe to go. But just as she turned around, she heard a growl and saw the faint glow of a pair of blue eyes reflecting off the ice-covered walls.

Before she could react, the creature had shot two blasts of ice at the tunnel entrance—one at the floor and another at the top of the threshold—sealing it for good. Then it leapt from the ceiling and landed with absolute grace in front of her, looking her over with a fierce expression.

Elsa would've been scared to death, had the shock of seeing it clearly for the first time not been too great for her to feel anything else. The eyes, the teeth, the wings—it all added up now quite unexpectedly. She had seen depictions of this kind of creature before in so many of the books she used to read as a child. Whether this was indeed a cursed person or an actual animal, she now knew something for a fact. It wasn't some sort of deform being or hybrid at all.

It was a dragon.

* * *

><p>AN: It's a short chapter, I know. You'll have to forgive me, but I still have a lot of homework to do and I still wanted to update today. Next chapter could be a bit short too, but it will be online tomorrow... unlike the chapters after that, which will take me longer to write and upload. Come to think of it, enjoy these regular updates 'cause they won't last much longer.**

**_Jenson22:_ I know, and thank you. Hiccup won't appear until after another ten or so chapters, but I agree, it will be interesting to watch.

>RedApple435: Thanks!

>YouNameIt: Ehm... maybe to all of your questions. Don't worry, you'll know soon enough ;).**

Don't forget to review on your way out!

5. The White Dragon

Sigurd could be really hateful, but Elsa had to give him credit for correctly deducing so much about the creature. It did have white skin, as white as snow. It was smart, as evidenced by this lair. And it did shoot ice at its victims, namely from its mouth. The only thing he couldn't have imagined was that it was a dragon. But how could he? How could anyone, for that matter? Dragons had been extinct for hundreds of years, eradicated by the dragon-slayers of old.

And yet, she was staring into the eyes of one.

Walking on all fours with its back arched, its height was about the same as Elsa's, if not even a bit taller. She could only imagine how much bigger it would look like if it stood again on two legs. From head to tail—long and ending in two fins—it had a length of no less than 20 feet, and judging from that split-second in which she had seen it with its bat-like wings extended, they had to be really huge. Perhaps it was not as large as those she had seen in her books,

but it was imposing regardless.

Elsa raised her hands, palms open and facing forward, as if to say _'I mean you no harm; please, don't kill me'_. But the dragon must've thought the opposite of her intended message because it roared angrily at her. This was its domain, and right now, she was an invader, a threat—one that had to be eliminated. It breathed deeply and then exhaled a blast of ice at her just as fast as it had shot the first two at the tunnel. Elsa shielded her face and closed her eyes—

—and when she opened them again, she found that a ball of ice about the size of her head was floating harmlessly a few inches away from her hands. And she could feel it, not with her skin but with her mind, much in the same way as she could feel the ice of her Palace.

A grin appeared on her face.

With a wave of her hands, she turned the ice ball into snow and spread it all around her. The dragon looked shocked by this for a moment, but it quickly recovered from it and shot another blast— and another— and another.

This time, however, knowing now that she _could_ control the dragon's ice, Elsa simply flicked her left hand then her right, deflecting the first two shots with ease and causing them to impact on the ice-covered rock walls behind her, and then she used both hands to stop the third short, holding it midair without even touching it.

And you thought that I'd be defenseless against an ice-breathing monster, Sigurd.

The dragon opened its maw again, but nothing came out. Its eyes instantly became filled with fear and dread. It crouched down to ground level and backed against the wall. So Sigurd had also been right about the beast not being able to make too much ice at a time, but surely it could still use its claws and teeth to fight. This could only mean that it had realized how formidable an enemy Elsa and her superior ice powers could be and thought that its days were numbered. She could almost read its pleas for mercy in its eyes before it closed them and waited for the end to come.

_That's also why _I_ had to be the one to find it and not Sigurd. _He_ would've killed it on sight without a second thought._

Elsa looked at the ice ball hovering between her hands. She sensed that it was denser than it should be. This small sphere was actually made up of hyper-compressed semi-frozen water, only its outer shell hard enough to endure for a while and with small pockets of equally compressed air scattered everywhere inside of it. That's why there were so few impact marks on the walls; a single one of these packed more ice than she thought possible. Maybe even enough to—

Do you wanna build a snowman?

An idea popped into her mind.

She gently placed the ice ball on the ground in front of her and

then, waving her hands again, she turned the ice blocking her exit into frost. She attracted it to her across the air and used it to make a life-size frost figure of the dragon, starting with the tail and then the belly and the legs. She tried to make it as accurate as it was possible in an environment with zero visibility, but she believed that the proportions and shape were just about right.

The frost she had first conjured from the dragon's ice ran out before she could complete the figure, which was still missing the wings and the head, but she'd already considered that. She turned her attention back to the sphere at her feet. She began uncompressing the ice shell and semi-solid contents, turning it into a stream of frost and adding it to her artwork. She completed the wings in seconds and still had enough ice to build the head. As she did, she thought of Anna. She would be enjoying herself if she were here helping her build this 'snowman' if there were not an actual dragon only a few feet away from her.

All the while, the dragon had kept its eyes shut, but now it was opening them again and the fearful expression in them became one of curiosity and wonder when it saw what Elsa was working on. She finished piling up the frost and stepped back to contemplate her work, noticing out the corner of her eye that the dragon was slowly approaching, head tilted to its side and eyes opened wide. Once satisfied, she touched the figure with the tip of her fingers.

With a beautiful display of light and swirling snowflakes, the frost figure became a well-defined ice statue.

The dragon recoiled at the sight of this, but only for a moment. Then, it growled at the statue a few times, baring its teeth and narrowing its eyes. When it saw that the statue wasn't moving an inch, it relaxed and approached it slowly and less menacingly. Elsa imagined it would be thinking that it was looking at its own reflection in a mirror. As the dragon circled left of the statue, still perplexed by it, she stepped to the right of it. She wasn't finished yet.

Using her own winter magic now, she conjured out of thin air another two smaller frost figures in front of the dragon statue and repeated the process of turning them into ice with her touch "revealing them to be statues of the children that had been with her the night before. The statue of Kat was reaching to the dragon statue the same way as the real Kat had done.

The dragon stared at the two new ice figures then at Elsa, and she saw realization in its eyes. It remembered her.

"I'm not here to harm you," Elsa said out loud, her arms lowered this time. Kat had talked to the dragon the first time, and it had worked, so she hoped that it would now.

It did. The dragon tilted its head again before looking at the ice children, humming softly. Elsa began walking backwards ever so slowly towards the tunnel. When she reached it, she thawed half of the sled in such a way that the other half would become a sort of small ramp for the barrel to slide open.

As soon as its contents spilled on the ground, the dragon shifted its attention to them. It sniffed the air and smacked its lips. Elsa

retreated back into the tunnel, and after a few minutes, she turned around and ran back the way she'd come.

Her heart was beating furiously by the time she reached the exit. She was excited, a bit nervous, amazed, elated, and on the verge of tears, all at the same time. She'd had an encounter with a dragon and survived! She didn't realize that she had a huge smile on her face until her muscles ached from it, and then she burst out laughing. _I had an encounter with a living, breathing dragon and survived! Oh, nobody's going to believe this!_

She stepped on the ice column and shrank it all the way to the ground. She boarded her boat and thawed the ice around it, and then she steered it away from the shore, heading back to Arendelle. But as the small ship moved away from the cliffs, she couldn't help looking back just one more time.

From the cave entrance, the dragon was watching her sail away.

* * *

><p>The next morning, the people of Arendelle woke up to a cloudy sky that promised more rainâ€”or more snow. Sigurd had taken his men outside the castle walls and to the small plaza by the docks at dawn, hoping to find a trail of torn baskets and broken crates and barrels to lead them to the monster, but aside from the one missing barrel of fish from one of the warehouses, they obviously found nothing. He returned to the castle frustrated, yammering about this being the first time that the beast didn't leave a mess behind and that unless it did during one of its next strikes, it would take them no less than another month to track it to the next village.<p>

Elsa was having the time of her life seeing Sigurd's crestfallen expression. She wanted to mock him, and part of her even wanted to brag about her achievement, but she managed to keep an impassive countenance, and she said nothing to no one. She had been fortunate enough that the soldier she'd left unconscious was still 'sleeping' when she got back from the caves. She had been even luckier that he hadn't known what had hit him and that nobody believed his claim that it had been the monster, as he had been found lying on the floor, 'sleeping'. She'd also been careful enough to undo her ice boat, though she had kept the sail with her. There was no need to push her luck any further.

Yet another part of her wanted so badly to tell Anna the truth so that they could both laugh together about it, but she didn't want to involve her in her little scheme. Especially because she had decided to continue carrying it out.

Judging from the dragon's behavior during her visit, she had come to the conclusion that it was not a cursed person after all but simply an animal. A highly intelligent animal, but an animal regardless. And she would help it, just like the children had said. She would have to come up with another way to escape the castle every night without having to hit any more guards, but she was determined to do this. She would protect it from any harm and keep it safe no matter what.

Because somehow, she could see something of her old self, solitary and fearful, in its eyes.

And because for all she knew, this could be the last dragon alive.

* * *

><p>AN: In case the description wasn't accurate enough, yeah, that was a white Night Fury. You didn't really think I'd just chosen the name "Ice Fury" because Elsa would be making a lot of ice, did you? ;) **

**Sorry for the delay. I actually had this ready to upload yesterday night, but since I'm updating both this and the Spanish version at the same time and I still had to translate it, well... better late than never, eh?

>

**Jenson22:**** Yeah, I'm afraid so, that was the idea from the very beginning. Still, I hope you'll like it 'cause along with the introduction of this Ice Fury, I'll be explaining my own idea of why Furies are so rare to find in future chapters.**

**Next chapter will not be online until Wednesday night _if_ everything goes according to plan. Until then... **

**Don't forget to review on your way out! **

6. A Unique Bond

"Hello? Are you here?"

There was no reply.

Right, because animals don't speak. What was I thinking?

Elsa walked into the icy den and looked up. The dragon wasn't in the ceiling. It wasn't anywhere, in fact, so she decided to just leave the fish at the back of the cavern and return home early. Hopefully, the dragon would not be at Arendelle right now and would soon return safe and sound from whatever it was that it was doing.

The weather was favoring the dragon, indeed. For three days straight, rain clouds had covered Arendelle, soaking the ground for a while before the raindrops became snowflakes. After that, the sun hadn't come up in the last couple of days, allowing for the snow to last longerâ€”and for the "monster" to raid the town every night. Five fish barrels had disappeared without a trace so far, infuriating Sigurd to the point where Elsa wondered if his face could get any redder.

She and Anna laughed about it whenever the latter came to her room, which was every afternoon. Then, they would talk about the delayed celebration and other affairs concerning the kingdomâ€”usually the less boring, as Anna was fond of saying. But when night came, Elsa would tell her that she was going to bed early and ask her to leave and get some sleep too. She hated keeping secrets from her, but it was for her own safety. That way, if Sigurd questioned her, she wouldn't have to lie about what Elsa was really doing. And heaven knew Anna was a terrible liar.

Her escape route had changed slightly. Instead of using one of the guarded back doors on the wall, and taking advantage of the thick mist, she would find an unguarded spot and conjure a mound of snow beneath her feet for her to climb the wall and drop down the other side, breaking her fall with yet another mound of snow. From there, the rest had become a routine: walk on the water to the docks, pick a fish barrel, make her sailboat and add the sail she'd kept from the first boat, travel back to the caves, deliver the fish, return to Arendelle.

The dragon was always on its cavern deep inside the cave system, and it would usually just ignore Elsa once she spilled the fish on the ground at the back of the lair, which allowed her to slip away unnoticed. _Without the dragon here today, things should be a lot easier_, Elsa thought as she turned the barrel over and dropped the fish. But then, she heard a soft gurgle behind her and realized that it had never left.

She turned around. There it was, standing next to the ice statues, between her and the exit. It was looking fixedly at her, from top to bottom. She didn't move, waiting for the dragon to do it first. And when it finally did, she almost wished it hadn't. It stood on two feet and inhaled deeply, getting ready to shoot its ice.

Here we go again.

But the dragon didn't attack her. Instead, it thrust its head forward in such a way that its maw was aiming at the ground and exhaled an intermittent stream of frost, slowly building up a pillar. Elsa noticed that the pillar had a shape to it, though she couldn't make it out until the dragon finished making it. Then she realized that it lookedâ€¦ human.

The dragon rested again on all fours and started to scrape off some of the frost with its claws, further shaping the figure. Once it finished, it nodded in approval of its own masterpiece and touched the figure gently with its right paw. Needless to say, nothing happened. And yet, the dragon seemed aware that nothing _would_ happen, for it looked again at Elsa as it placed its paw again on the figure.

Elsa understood what it was trying to tell her. She approached slowly and extended her hand, nodding slowly to ask for the dragon's permission. It didn't nod back or make any gesture of any kind; it just looked at her.

"Okay, if you insist," Elsa sighed. She touched the pillar which turned into ice.

Her jaw dropped. _Did it just make a figure of _me?_

The dragon crooned in excitement and wagged its tail. It looked proud of its handiwork. Elsa, on the other hand, just analyzed the figure. She was astounded; it wasn't as detailed as her own statues, especially the face, but it was close enough. The braid was there, sort of. The hands were placed in front of it, one on top of the other, at waist level. The dress didn't have the same intricate design as hers, but it still looked like an actual garment. Overall, it was an impressive masterpiece, for an animal. Had it made it out of competitiveness or as a way to say that it knew that they shared

similar abilities? Whatever the reason, it brought a wide smile to her face.

"It's beautiful," she complimented.

What happened next was something she wouldn't have expected in a million years. The dragon tilted its head to the side, frowning as it looked again at Elsa, before peeling back its lips in a way so characteristic that it was impossible to be mistaken for something else.

It was smiling back.

Elsa wondered if this dragon could amaze her any more. First, it had observed her and made as accurate a replica of her as an animal could make, and now, it was mimicking her gesture. And by the way, where did the teeth go? She knew for a fact that it had teeth. Her astonishment, however, didn't let her worry about that little thing. She shook her head in disbelief and felt compelled to do something absolutely crazy.

"Why would people have wanted to kill so many of you in the past?" she questioned, lifting her hand towards the dragon's face.

The dragon's smile disappeared rather drastically and was replaced by a terrified look and frantic growling as it recoiled away from Elsa before she could even touch it.

"No, no, no! Relax, I won't hurt you," Elsa said, lowering her hand slightly. The dragon looked frantically at the ice statues then at her, and it dawned on her that it could be thinking that she would freeze whatever she touched. "Oh, no, don't worry. I wouldn't freeze you. I mean, I would've a year ago, but not now." _Okay, maybe I shouldn't have said that last part._

The dragon was still keeping its distance, so Elsa began looking around for something to grab and prove her point. "Ah! Here, look," she said, picking up one of the fish and holding it in both hands. It didn't freeze, despite the fact that she held it for several minutes.

And still the dragon stayed away from her.

Dismayed, Elsa threw the fish away. "That's fine. I imagine you're not too trustful of us humans, are you?" She sat down on the ground with her back against the wall, just a few feet away from the fish. Snow began falling inside the cavern. She felt sad, depressed, and with a heavy heart, but why? Why was she feeling like this just because the dragon hadn't trusted her enough to let her touch it? She shouldn't have expected more from an animal, no matter how smart it was.

But maybe it had nothing to do with her expectations of it. Maybe it had to do with the feelings that the dragon's look had stirred within her—those familiar feelings she'd thought were long gone by now but which had never really left.

Loneliness. Guilt.

"This takes me back, you know?" she thought out loud. "That look on

your face? I saw it in everyone's faces on my coronation day a year ago, when the secret of my powers became known. You see, I'd tried to keep them concealed for most of my life, but that night I justâ€¦ I lost control. Everyone was scared of me. This man even called me a sorceress and a monster." The image was still fresh in her mindâ€”how she hadn't meant to shoot ice at the Duke of Weselton but she hadn't been able to stop it from happening anyway. It was a miracle he was still alive today. "So I ran away. Away from people, away from the worldâ€¦ from everything. I ended up in the North Mountain and built for myself a place of isolation where I could be who I wasâ€”who I amâ€”without hurting anybody. Or, so I thought."

She scoffed to herself. She should've known better back then. "Then my younger sister, Anna, showed up there. She wasn't afraid of me. In spite of what she'd seen I could do, she was not afraid of me. She had come for me, to take me back home with her, saying that we could be close again just like we used to be so long ago." She sighed. "Poor Anna. It's been a year since that and almost fifteen since I shut her out, and I still can't imagine how hard it must've been for her, always wondering why we drifted apart all of sudden."

Elsa was no longer paying attention to the dragon's actions. She just wanted to get rid of what had been eating her away for so long. "To this day, she still believes she first learned of my powers a year ago. But she can never know the truth. Only my parents and I knew the secret, and now that they're goneâ€¦" Her parents. Her only source of comfort during all those years of isolation in her room, and even then, she couldn't bring herself to hug them after that ill-fated night out of fear that she would hurt them. What she wouldn't give to be held in their arms just one more time. "I have never told a living soul, but since you can't really say a word to anyone, I might as well tell you."

She took a deep breath to contain the sobs that were starting to build up in her throat. "I hit her with my powers accidentally when we were kids. I'd made a sort of winter wonderland in the throne room for us to play in it, and we were having a wonderful time together. She loved my powers and what I could do with them. Come to think of it, I didn't know fear back then. I was happy. But then things started to get out of control andâ€¦ I slipped in my own ice and thought I would be unable to break her fall andâ€¦"

She had to pause. The memory was still too painful. "My parents had to take her to the trolls to save her, but in order to do so, the Troll King had to remove not only the magic from her head but also the memories of magic."

Elsa couldn't hold back the tears anymore. Oh, how she would've loved to grow up beside her sister, to go out and play with her each time she came to knock on her door, to build her an army of snowmen each winter! If only she had known back then that the key to controlling her powers was loveâ€¦

"Anyway," she continued, wiping the tears away, "she showed up at my Ice Palace and tried to convince me to return to Arendelle. And that's when I learned that I had unleashed an eternal winter everywhere. The shock and the fear made me lose control, and I hit Anna with my powers again. Only this time, it wasn't her head that I froze but her heart." She shook her head. "I'd tried so hard and for so long to keep her safe from me, but in the end it didn't work. And

yet, when she saw me in danger, she used her last breath to sacrifice herself for me. And then it turned out that her sacrifice saved both of us! Can you believe it? Because an act of true love will thaw a frozen heart."

The snow stopped falling. Tears were clouding Elsa's vision again, though these were tears of joy and happiness and relief. She felt like an enormous weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Yeah, I definitely needed to let that go. But why now? She could've gotten all of it off her chest anytime, without a need to be heard by anyone.

She chuckled. There was a reason for this timing. "I guess the point I'm trying to make here is that I understand why you'd rather be alone and avoid contact with the rest of the world. In a way, I think you and I aren't that different from each other. You've chosen isolation because you fear people might hurt you. I chose isolation because I feared hurting people. But in the end, isolation is not the ultimate answer. Don't get me wrong, it's not that bad to be alone sometimes, but what we all really need is love and friendship, someone to thaw our hearts whenever they get frozen. I owe Anna so much. Had it not been for her, I would've never learned how to control my powers, and I would still be aloneâ€| or maybe even dead."

She stared at the ceiling, exhausted from this sudden outburst of emotion. Slowly, her eyelids shut and she drifted offâ€|

â€|until a sudden puff to her face woke her up.

She opened her eyes and saw the dragon's face mere inches from her own. Its eyes no longer shone with fear but with empathy. Was this a sign of trust? Was the dragon willing to let her touch it? Had Elsa gotten through to it? Instinctively, she raised her hand close to the dragon's nose, and this time it didn't flinch. It just closed its eyes in anticipation.

She touched it.

Its scaly skin was cold and surprisingly smooth. She closed her eyes and enjoyed this amazing experience with every fiber of her being. She felt a unique bond with this dragon somehow, and she liked to think that the dragon felt it too.

It eventually stepped back, and Elsa opened her eyes to find that it was smiling again at her. Then, it turned its attention back to the fish. It ate a couple of them before lying down on the floor, getting ready to sleep. It gestured at Elsa with its head, beckoning her to come closer. And she did, without hesitation. She sat next to the dragon and rested her head on its chest. The dragon then covered her up with its tail, as if to keep her safe from the cold of its den.

"Oh, thank you, but that's not necessary," Elsa said, yawning. "The cold doesn't bother me. That's something else I believe we have in common."

* * *

><p>Elsa woke up with no idea of how much time had passed. It

could've been an hour; it could've been a day. There was no way to tell from inside here. She stretched her arms and legs and stood up, watching the sleeping dragon and listening to its deep, steady breath. Such a wonderful creature.<p>

She walked all the way back to the cave entrance in the cliff. Once there, she searched for the sun in the now cloudless sky and was startled to find that it was already setting on the horizon. Anna would surely be freaking out by now, wondering where her sister could've gone. Elsa could only hope that Anna would come to the conclusion that she had gone visiting Marshmallow at the Ice Palace. As for Sigurd| frankly, she didn't care an iota what he'd say.

A soft crooning behind her made her lose her train of thought. The dragon was approaching her. "Hey girl," she said, turning back. "Sleep well?"

The dragon growled softly in reply.

Yeah, Elsa had decided that this was a girl dragon. It behaved a lot like a female, in her opinion| strong yet noble, a bit playful perhaps, and definitely less brutish than a male would probably be. She could be wrong, of course; this could be the dragon's normal behavior regardless of gender. Still, she liked to entertain the thought that this particular dragon was like a young girl, much like Anna| and much like her, when she was a lot younger.

"I'd really love to stay here with you a while longer, but I need to check up on Anna, if only to make sure she hasn't had a nervous breakdown." She began walking towards the ice column, but then she had another crazy idea. "I don't suppose you could fly me back to Arendelle, could you?"

If Elsa had still had any doubts that this creature could surprise her any more, they vanished when she looked at it again. At the sole mention of flight, the dragon had retreated back into the cave, fearfully looking up to the sky.

"Wait," Elsa said, still not believing what her eyes were seeing. "You don't fly?"

Again, the word made the dragon get nervous. It ran back to its cavern, leaving Elsa speechless.

This dragon doesn't fly. Why doesn't it fly?

* * *

><p>The door to Elsa's room opened slowly. Anna instantly diverted her attention from the now empty courtyard and looked back to see her sister tiptoe inside. And before the door had closed and Elsa could react, Anna had rushed to squeeze her sister, glad to see her alive and well."<p>

"Elsa, you're okay!" she breathed in relief. "I knew you were okay. Are you okay?"

"I would be if you'd just let me breathe," Elsa replied hoarsely.

"Oh, sorry," Anna said with an apologetic smile, letting go of her. Elsa sucked in air a couple of times. "Sigurd said you had ignored the curfew again and that the monster had caught you. I knew he couldn't be right, but when you didn't show up I feared he _could_ be right."

"What? Annaâ€" " she vaguely heard Elsa say.

"I mean, you could've gone to your Ice Palace for all I knew, but what if the monster had attacked you on your way there."

"Annaâ€" "

"And yeah, you could've used your powers to stop it. You know the saying, fight fire with fire, only you'd be fighting ice with ice. But maybe it had overpowered you and taken youâ€" "

"Anna!" Elsa exclaimed, and Anna realized that she had started talking real fastâ€" again. She shrugged and smiled apologetically once more. "Where are Sigurd and his men?"

"Oh, right. They left over two hours ago to search for the monster and bring you back. Where were you anyway?"

"Hold on," Elsa said, not having heard Anna's question or simply ignoring it. "They've been sitting on their hands for over a week, waiting for theâ€" 'monster' to leave any kind of trail for them to follow, and now they suddenly change their minds and decide to hunt it down?"

"Well, he caused a bit of a stir among the townspeople with his allegation that the Queen had been abducted by the beast. They kind of forced him to go search for you afterwards."

"And what's their plan, to leave no stone unturned in Arendelle until they find it? It will flee before they can even get close to it."

"Oh, don't worry about that. Some of our guards offered to guide them to the caves. Sigurd was actually irked to learn about them until now. Anyway, I'm sure they'll find it there. Now, where did you go last night?"

Elsa's face became pale. "They're going to the caves?"

"Yes, where else in Arendelle could it be hiding? Are you going to tell me where you went?" Elsa didn't reply. She seemed in shock. "Oh, wait. Elsa, you're not still worried that it might be a cursed person, are you? We talked about this the other day, it's not a person. At least I don't think it's a person. Whatever that monster isâ€" "

"It's not a monster, Anna, it's a dragon!" Elsa shouted on the verge of desperation.

For once, Anna was lost for words. Elsa began pacing around the room while she tried to make sense of what her older sister had just told her. _A dragon?!_

"Elsa, listen to yourself," she said eventually. "Dragons are just myths. How can you say such a silly thing?" Elsa didn't reply, but she looked hurt by the question, and Anna knew that this was neither a joke nor an invention. So either Elsa was going crazy, orâ€¦ "You found it, didn't you?" she asked, more a statement than a question.

"Yes, Anna, I found it," Elsa finally said.

"And why didn't you tell me?"

Elsa sighed, frustrated. "Because I wanted to protect you."

"Protect me from what?" Anna questioned her, raising an eyebrow.

"You were right, Anna. I too feel like Sigurd is hiding something big. This is more than just an obsession to kill a monster and avenge his people as he claims. I think this curfew is not really about protecting people but keeping them from learning what I learned."

"Okay, just stop right there. Are you saying that it knows what the monsterâ€¦the dragon really is?"

"I don't know. But the truth is, I found it first, and he nearly killed me for it. I know he would've slit my throat that night if he had the choice. I didn't want to involve you in all this because if he even suspects that you know something, he could use you against me, and if he didâ€¦"

If he did, Elsa could decide to forget about everything and use her powers to stop him at all costs, Anna completed the idea in her mind. She nodded in understanding.

Elsa walked up to the window and looked outside. She shook her head. "It might be the only way now, though," she said almost imperceptibly.

"Elsa?" Anna approached her slowly.

"I'm sorry, Anna. But I can't let Sigurd kill her."

"Her?" Anna repeated.

"The dragon," Elsa said, turning around to look at Anna. "I'm afraid I _will_ need your help if I am to save it."

Anna didn't know what to reply. She would've gone to the end of the world for her, but this was different. She wouldn't help her sister get killed to save an animalâ€¦if it even was what Elsa said it was. What if she had hallucinated or imagined it?

"Anna, do you trust me?" Elsa asked. There was no shadow of doubt in her face. She had found a dragon, and she was determined to save it for some reason. Anna had to believe in her.

"With my life, Elsa."

"Then listen carefully."

* * *

><p>AN: So, as you can see, everything went as planned. Longest chapter so far, but I still managed to upload it today! I hope you all enjoyed it.**

Now, let's get to the good news/bad news part. The bad news is, I won't be able to update until **maybe on Monday or Tuesday next week. The good news is, I'm preparing something very special for Chapter 7, which is also why it will take me so long to upload it.**

**_Jenson22:_ Thank you! I'm glad you liked it, and don't worry, I will.

>RedApple435: Thanks!

>Sorceric7: No, not really, though I must admit that the Bewilderbeast's icy breath was what inspired me to write this fic. Long story.

>UnknownBlackHand: Wow, I think yours is the first review ever to mention anything about my grammar, and by that I mean _ever_. Thank you for your compliments on both that and the story itself, and thanks also for the suggestion. I actually have a nice explanation as to why this dragon breathes ice, but it**'ll** be a few chapters before we get to that.

>White Hunter: Yes she has. I'm glad you like it, and I hope you liked this chapter.

>

I'll see you next week. Until then...

Don't forget to review on your way out!

7. Let It Go

Anna kept fiddling and breathing heavily as the sled glided across the snow-covered road. _I can do this_, she repeated in her mind. _I can do this, I can do thisâ€¦|_

"I can't do this," she admitted out loud, burying her face in her hands.

"Of course you can," Kristoff reassured her. "I've seen you do crazier things before."

"Mention but one," she replied, her voice muffled.

"Just one?" he teased her. She narrowed her eyes at him.

"Fine, make that three."

"Oh, well, thank you! I thought you'd make things harder for me." He started counting with one hand while holding the reins with the other. "You nearly married a lunatic usurper, you went to search for your sister all by yourself, you jumped over a chasm on Sven's back not far from here, you tried to climb a rock wall on your ownâ€¦| Aw, nuts, I ran out of fingers. Olaf, wanna lend me a hand?"

"Sure, here you go," Olaf replied from behind the back of the sled,

detaching one of his stick arms from his body and lifting up with the other.

"Thanks. Where was I?"

"The rock wall," Olaf said.

"Right. You outwitted a gigantic snowman, you dropped down a cliff, you went out during a blizzard to find me, and you got between the aforementioned lunatic usurper and your sister to save her. Huh, that's three times what you asked for, and that's just what you did in the first few days I met you. Want me to continue with some of the things you've done since?"

In spite of herself, Anna smiled and giggled a bit. "No, thank you. I think that's enough."

Kristoff placed his arm around her waist and drew her closer. "Don't you worry, Anna. You'll do just fine."

"Yeah, how hard can it be to convince that guy Sigurd that you want to help him look for Elsa?" Olaf said as cheerfully as ever.

That brought back the nerves. Elsa had asked Anna to delay Sigurd and his men while she hurried back to the caves in that neat ice sailboat she'd made out of nowhere. Not an easy task for Anna, since she wasn't used to lying. She'd always say something unconsciously that would give her away whenever she tried. It simply wasn't part of her nature.

But now there were two lives that were depending on how good a show she could put on. Her plan was to join Sigurd as he and his men searched inside the caves, and once there she'd find a way to distract or even mislead them. Anna took a deep breath. _Olaf's right. How hard can it be?_

"There they are," Kristoff said, pointing to the right at a number of lights among the trees. There was no room for the sled in the woods, so he decided to leave it on the road. Kristoff grabbed the lamp and released Sven from the sled while Anna stepped out of it and approached the snowman sitting on the back.

"Olaf, I need you to stay here," she told him.

"Why?" he replied, the slightest hint of disappointment in his face.

"Look, I appreciate your coming with me, but I'm afraid you might be a sort of distraction," Anna stuttered.

"Isn't that the idea, to distract them?"

"Yeah, but..." She sighed. "Those soldiers haven't seen you before, and to be honest, seeing a talking snowman for the first time is kind of shocking. Like, remember when we first met?"

Olaf nodded. Of course he had to remember; Anna had literally knocked his head off. How could anyone forget _that_?

"Tell you what. If I can't delay them long enough, I'll call out for

you so you can blow everyone away, deal?"

"Deal," he replied with a thumbs-up. Anyone else would've probably been upset, but not him. His childish smile was back, and as Anna turned around to leave, he said, "Hey, how about a warm hug to lift your spirits?"

Anna chuckled and hugged him. "Thank you, Olaf."

"You'll be fine, Anna," he told her.

"Yeah. That's what Elsa kept saying before she left."

"See? Nothing to worry about. Cheer up!"

Anna nodded and let go of him to follow Kristoff and Sven into the woods. It wasn't long before she heard shouting in the distance, as well as a loud thumping and the sound of glass shattering.

"Well done, men. Now gather your weapons and be ready!" That was Sigurd. He barked more orders, indicating who would stay at the cave entrance and who would follow him into the cave itself. Anna picked up her pace.

"Captain Sigurd!" she called out once she was close enough for him and everyone else to hear. There was no reply, but she noticed that all movement had stopped, so they must've heard her. "Captain Sigurd!" she called again.

"Who's there?" she heard him say. Several soldiers raised their weapons, aiming in the direction of Kristoff's lamp, until it became clear who it was.

She then heard the soldiers whisper among themselves—"whispers along the lines of "It's the Princess!" and "What is she doing here?" They made way for her and her small entourage, and as she advanced, she caught a glimpse of the large chunks of broken ice at the entrance. So what she'd heard was the sound of ice, not glass, breaking apart. This must've been an ice wall or something similar sealing off the caves. Until now.

"Well, well, to what do we owe the honor of your presence, Princess?" Sigurd said. The sarcasm in his voice was not lost on Anna.

She gathered her courage and replied, "We've come to help."

The murmur increased. Sigurd raised an eyebrow. "Help?"

"To find my sister," she said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Sigurd scoffed. "You cannot be serious."

"Does it look like I'm joking to you?"

Sigurd shook his head. "I don't have time for this."

"Neither do I. So, what can I do?"

"Princess, this is not child's play. This is a real monster we're

hunting, not a fluffy little bunny."

Anna didn't have to feign offense as part of her act. "Do you really think I'm a soft-handed, fussy, weak little princess? I am a quite capableâ€"

"Can you lift a sword?"

The question made Anna hesitate for a second. "Well, it's not like I couldn't if I tried. I just never haveâ€"

"How about a crossbow, then? Can you fire one of those?"

"What? No, butâ€"

"I suppose you could at least hold a spear."

"I-Iâ€"that's not the point."

"Oh, I believe it is, Princess," he stressed her royal title, "because if youâ€"if any of youâ€"cannot wield any kind of weapon, then all you're good for is as cannon fodder, just like your sister."

That struck a chord. "Excuse me? How dare you speak of Elsa like that? She's the Queen, and you are here to rescue her!"

Sigurd sighed and leaned closer to Anna's face. "I came to these caves only because your loyal subjects asked me to, but if I may be blunt, I'm afraid all we're going to find is your sister's cold corpse and a monster to kill for it. If it were up to me, I would gladly let you join her in the afterlife, but I don't think your people would let me walk out of here alive if I did."

For some reason, and even though Anna knew better, the way in which Sigurd spoke of her sister made her feel a terrible anguish and dread, worse even than what she felt when Hans was about to kill Elsa. It almost made her believe that she was truly gone.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, Princess," Sigurd said, walking away and barking orders to his men again.

Anna clenched her fists, rage coursing through her veins. Kristoff seemed to notice and placed a hand on her shoulder. He said something, but she didn't pay attention. She shook herself loose from Kristoff's hand and walked towards Sigurd.

"No, you'll listen to me, Sideburns!" she said, grabbing Sigurd's arm and forcing him to turn around. "You don't tell me what I can or can't do, and you don't say that my sister is dead!"

Sigurd's shock only lasted a second. "What did you callâ€"

"My sister is still alive, and I'm going to find her with or without your help!" Anna yelled, not willing to let Sigurd say another word until he'd listened what she had to say. "I am not losing her again. I've had enough of that already."

"Annaâ€|" Kristoff began.

"No!" she snapped. Tears of rage and despair began rolling down her face. "It's my fault she's out here. I should've seen the signs. She'd been acting different and I didn't pay enough attention to it. I've been slowly losing her in the last few days without even noticing. If I had justâ€¦" The sobs were threatening to cut her off, but she managed to get a hold of herself. "I've lost her twice before. I'm not losing her again. So I don't care what you say or think because, ultimately, this is our kingdomâ€¦"my sister's and mineâ€¦"and you don't have a say in this. You think I'm not capable? Deal with it."

Her face was red and her eyes watery, though she fought the tears hard. She held her stare at Sigurd and was vaguely aware that the rest of his men and the Royal Guards were not moving. It wasn't hard to imagine why; it's not every day that you see a princess lose all self-control like that, not even in Arendelle.

Sigurd, however, only rolled his eyes. "I guess it runs in the family," she heard him mutter. Then, he said, "Princess, I understand your reasons, but my answer is still no. And since you leave me no other choiceâ€¦"

He beckoned the Royal Guards, and when they approached mounted on their horses, he told them, "I know you are bound by oath to protect the Royal Family at all costs, so tell me: Would you be willing to let your Princess get herself killed, leaving this kingdom without anyone to rule it?"

The guards looked at Anna then at Sigurd. They all replied, "No."

"Then would you be so kind as to escort Her Majesty back to the castle?"

"Are you sure, Captain?" the leader of the guards said. "Those caves are like a maze andâ€¦"

"Don't worry about us. We have all the time in the world. That monster is not going anywhere; it's trapped."

Not for long, Sideburns, Anna thought.

The horse guards nodded and made a half-circle around Anna and between her and Sigurd. She looked resentfully at them but finally relented, turning around and walking away from the cave entrance, with Kristoff and Sven by her side and the guards trailing closely behind. When they reached the sled, Kristoff tied it again to his faithful reindeer friend and hopped inside. Anna followed him, discreetly making sure that Olaf was still hidden beneath the blankets on the back. The guards surrounded the sled, and then they all headed back to Arendelle.

At least that's what Sigurd would believe now.

When they were a good distance away, Anna told Kristoff to stop the sled. He complied without a question, and the guards were forced to stop as well. Then she called for the leader of the guards and said to him, "Return to the castle. We'll join you later, but first I need to go elsewhere."

"But Captain Sigurd" the guard began.

"You answer to me and to the Queen, not to that buffoon," she said as authoritatively as she could.

"Yes, Your Highness," the guard replied. "But if I may be so bold, where will you go to?"

Anna took a deep breath. "I need to believe that my sister is still alive, so I must believe that she's not in that cave. And that only leaves one other place where she could be."

The guards nodded in understanding and obeyed. Once they were gone, Kristoff began to chuckle. "Anna, that was perfect! I knew you could do it. Oh, what an act!"

Anna didn't smile, though. "It wasn't an act," she said. And with that, she let the tears flow again.

"Oh, Anna," Kristoff said, hugging her. He didn't say anything else; he just held her in his arms.

"I know it's silly, but I do feel like I'm losing Elsa all over again. And I understand her reasons for keeping the secret, I really do. But it still feels like when I thought"

She couldn't continue. She just cried in Kristoff's shoulder for heaven knew how long. Suddenly, she felt a pair of stick arms hugging her gently by the neck, and she couldn't help the faint smile. Olaf. Those warm hugs couldn't belong to anyone else.

But it wasn't the snowman who broke the silence.

"Anna, you're not gonna lose Elsa," Kristoff told her. "She loves you. She always has."

He held her closer, lovingly, while Olaf just stayed there. Eventually, when the tears subsided, Anna was able to speak again. "At least we bought Elsa some time."

"You bet. And without our guards to guide them, they'll have a harder time finding their way inside those caves."

Anna sighed. "It's all up to Elsa now. Let's just hope she can manage to do whatever it is she's planning to do."

As they circled around on the sled to go the Ice Palace, Anna looked up to the sky. For the first time in over a week, the moon and the stars were clearly visible in the night sky, peaceful and bright. She blinked a few times, trying to rid her eyes of any leftover tears, and nearly missed the large shadow that flew silently overhead"too big to be a bird of any kind. Way too big.

Elsa?

* * *

><p>The usually long journey to the cave had taken Elsa only half an hour this time, and yet it felt like an eternity for her. Not having to worry about any of Sigurd's men watching her use her powers, she

had conjured a stronger gust of wind to bring her here faster. However, they still had a considerable advantage over her, having left the castle three hours ago. Even if Anna had managed to stall them, she was racing against the clock.<p>

Thus, she didn't bother to freeze the water around the sailboat like she always did. This time, she created the usual ice column beneath the boat, raising it all the way to the cave entrance. Then, she created her usual sled, but instead of loading it with a fish barrel, she loaded it with a saddle she'd taken from the stables. It obviously wouldn't fit the dragon's back, but it might fit in its neck, hopefully without hurting it. Finally, she retrieved the sail from the boat and placed it on top of the saddle.

She gave two steps into the cave, pulling the sled, and then she spun around and undid the column and the boat. There would be no going back from this. She either flew out of here on the dragon's back or died trying to protect itâ€”and the latter wasn't really an option, since she still had a sister and a kingdom to look after.

She moved as fast as she could with a loaded sled in tow. On her way back to Arendelle and then back here, she'd been thinking a lot about why the dragon wouldn't fly. It had both its wings, and as far as she could tell, it wasn't hurt or injured. Besides, if that were the case, she would've seen longing instead of fear in the dragon's eyes when it looked to the sky. So the problem wasn't that the dragon couldn't fly.

It didn't want to fly. That was the real problem.

Her brain hurt from thinking of every possible explanation for the dragon's fear. It could've had a bad experience while flying in the past, or even when it tried to fly for the first time in its life. Or perhaps it had seen another dragon being killed while flying, and all this dragon was trying to do was to avoid the risk altogether.

In any case, that last option only begged the question that had been plaguing her ever since she'd found the dragon. If they had all been killed centuries ago, how could this one still be alive? But that wasn't important now. If she managed to pull this off, she'dâ€”no. When she'd managed to pull this off, she'd worry about that unsolved mystery.

She reached the intersection and was about to turn left as usual, when she heard the echo of footsteps and whispering on the tunnel to her right. Sigurd's men were getting closer. She had to do something to slow them down without hurting themâ€”much. Her best option was the same one she'd used so far to slip away from the castle, although slightly different. She summoned a thick mist that would reduce their visibility and literally chill them to the bone, hindering their movements. She sealed that tunnel with ice, trying to make it look like what the dragon had done in the main cavern, and then she took a left and was again on her way.

Elsa was relieved to see the dragon still aliveâ€”sleeping peacefully on the ground, actuallyâ€”and its lair intact. She dragged the sled to where the dragon was and left it there to walk towards one of the sealed passages. She touched the dragon's ice to sense how thick it was and how much it could resist. It was strong and would hold its own against weapons such as swords and spears, but if Sigurd's men

had something strongerâ€”like battering ramsâ€”it wouldn't last long. The amount of time she had left would depend a lot on that factor.

She returned to where the dragon lay and patted it gently. "Hey, girl, wake up. We need to get out of here."

The dragon blinked a few times and yawned before waking up completely. It smiled when it saw Elsa.

"I'm glad to see you too," she said, smiling back at it. "Now, I know you understand every word I say, so listen to me carefully. I suppose you already know there's a bunch of people hunting you down, don't you? Well, they suspect you may be hiding here, so they have come for you. I can help you get out of here before they find you, but I need you to trust me and let me put this thing," she gestured at the saddle, "on you first. Will you let me?"

The dragon stared at her and crooned softly, and Elsa took it as a sign of approval. She grabbed the sail first and placed it on the dragon's neck, using her powers to shorten it enough so that it would serve as a saddle blanket. Then she picked up the saddle and placed it over the blanket, strapping it carefully so as not to choke the dragon.

"Good girl. Now come with me," Elsa said, turning the sled into a heap of snow and heading towards the tunnel. The dragon followed her closely until they were both out of the cavern. Then Elsa turned to undo the ice statues as wellâ€”but she couldn't bring herself to do it. They were a symbol, silent witnesses of the moment in which she and the dragon had developed a bond between them. She knew that leaving them there was a huge risk, but she couldn't destroy them. If only there was a way to preserve them, like by covering them with enough snow toâ€”

That gave her another idea. She called forth a small yet strong snowfall to quickly fill the cavern with snow, and before it overflowed through the entrance, she sealed it with thick ice. She smiled, satisfied; this way, not only would the statues be safe _and_ remain hidden, but the sheer amount of snow would also slow Sigurd down if his soldiers managed to bring down any of the ice walls sealing the other passages.

"Come on," she beckoned the dragon as she began walking away.

After a while, they reached the main entrance in the cliffs. The dragon looked around, as if searching for whatever thing Elsa was planning to use to escape. Finding nothing, it looked at her quizzically.

"That's our way out of here," Elsa said, pointing a finger at the sky.

The dragon seemed to understand immediatelyâ€”and it didn't like the idea. Like before, it began walking backwards slowly, getting away from the entrance. But Elsa was not willing to let it flee back into the cave again. She sealed off the tunnel behind them with as thick a wall of ice as possible before the dragon could even turn around and run away.

This drastic measure didn't seem to please the dragon. When it saw the ice wall, it roared and growled fiercely and charged at it, trying to bring it down, to no avail.

"Hey, calm down!" Elsa exclaimed, staying a good distance away from the dragon to avoid getting accidentally hurt. "It's for your own good. You need to fly away from here. It's the only way."

The dragon looked frantically at her.

"Please, just trust me. I wouldn't do this unless I knew for sure that you can do it. I am trusting you, too, and I'm not going anywhere. We're both flying out of here, together."

The dragon was starting to calm down, though it still looked frightened. Elsa walked slowly towards it. "I won't leave you. Whatever happens to you, it will happen to us both."

She lifted a hand to hold the saddle, but the dragon flinched and growled again. She sighed and closed her eyes. Talking to it had worked so far, but it wouldn't work now apparently. There had to be a way, something she hadn't tried yet, to get through to it. There had to be a wayâ€¦|

_"__The moon glows white on this kingdom tonight,__
>Not a raincloud to be seen.
>You're hiding in isolation.
>Don't I know it! I once did."

The dragon looked up, confused, clearly not expecting Elsa to sing in such a dire situation. As for her, the words came out spontaneously and with the same fluidity as they had that night a year ago when she reached the North Mountain. She wanted to remind the dragon of how similar they were to one another. Among other things, they both knew what was like to hide from everything and everyone. Her wanting it to leave this place wasn't just because. Its life was at risk if it didn't.

_"__But now they're coming,__
>And you won't be safe inside.
>Couldn't hold them up,
Heaven knows I tried."_

Despite her best efforts to keep the dragon safe from Sigurd, he and his men would soon be here to slay it. This place wasn't safe anymore. She had to convince the dragon of it.

_"__I don't know why you've got such fear_
>To fly in freedom, to experience such a thrill.
>But there's no choice, not anymore.
>It's time to go!"

She walked towards the entrance, beckoning the dragon with one hand. Whatever the reasons it had to stay on the ground, they didn't matter now. Sometimes, the only way out of a desperate situation is to do the one thing we're less willing to do, but once we do it, it turns out that it wasn't that bad. All that needs to be done is to get rid of the fearâ€¦and a friend to help you do it. Elsa knew it better than anyone, for while she had left her own fear behind that night, it would've been so much better if she'd had a friend by her side.

At least now she had the chance to be someone's friend, to help her now in a very unique way.

"__Let it go, let it go,__
>Don't hold it back anymore!
>Let it go, let it go,
>Turn away and slam the door!"

The dragon frowned at her, as if saying, 'There are no doors here', but Elsa didn't care. If anything, that only made her chuckle a bit before she continued.

"__Come, don't hide__
>Don't be afraid of flight
Let your wings unfold,__

>'Cause dragons are meant to be soaring high."

The dragon approached her hesitantly while she sang those words. "I know you can do this," she told it, cupping its face with her hands. "I have faith in you. Have faith in yourself and find the courage inside you."

She lifted her right hand again to hold the saddle, and this time the dragon allowed her to ride on its neck. As she mounted the dragon, it looked once more at the sky, and the terror in its eyes was finally replaced with decisiveness. Elsa tightened her grip on the saddle, getting ready for what she hoped would come next.

She never expected the dragon to lift off with such speed, though. They were at the cave entrance on the cliff one second and a hundred feet into the air the next, heading towards the ocean. She felt queasy for a moment there, but soon the excitement took that awful sensation away. It had worked! She'd helped the dragon get rid of its fear! And now they were both flying, together.

"You did it!" she shouted gleefully. "You did it, you did it, you did it!"

The dragon didn't seem as excited, but at least it didn't look scared anymore. It banked right and made a beeline for the mainland, but it wasn't going back to the cave. No, its angle would take them higher into the air. They were about to fly right above the cliffsâ€"and right above Sigurd's army, from what Elsa could make out. She cackled at the thought of him watching his beloved prize fly away, but also from the joy that she felt right now. This had to be the most amazing thing she'd ever experienced.

"__Can you see how some distance__
>Makes everything seem small,
>And the fears that once controlled you
>Can't get to you at all?"

The dragon looked briefly at her and growled. It was an 'I guess so' kind of growl, or so Elsa liked to think. But she wasn't done yet. The dragon had left the ground at last, but it still needed to enjoy it. Perhaps a bit of encouragement would do the trick.

"__It's time to see what you can do,__

>To test the limits and break through.
>No right, no wrong, no rules out here,
>Be free!"

With each passing second, the dragon seemed to get bolder and more confident. It began climbing higher and faster while Elsa kept singing.

_"__Let it go, let it go,_
>Be one with the wind and sky!
>Let it go, let it go,
>Forever you will fly!"

Elsa then found that there were some clouds left in the sky after all. She just hadn't been able to see them from the cave entrance. The dragon headed towards them, its tongue stuck out. Her smile grew.

_"__Here you stand,_
>And here you stay!
>Let your wings unfold!"

The dragon looked at her again, and she saw a glint in its eyes. Then, it began spinning, and Elsa had to hold on tightly to the saddle, but her smile didn't fade away. She was enjoying every moment of it.

_"__So, now you know that through the air you move unbound,_
>Your soul is spiraling in clouds and airstreams all
around,
And one thought translates into loops and rolls and
dives."_

While Elsa sang those words, the dragon made more and more maneuvers. It did dive and then fly back up at unimaginable speeds. When flying through the clouds, it made all kinds of rolls, loops, spins, and even freefalls. At some point during one of the maneuvers, Elsa couldn't help it anymore; with only her left hand still grasping the saddle, she began shooting ice and snow from her right one, leaving a beautiful white swirl in their wake. The dragon looked back and saw the trail of snowflakes and ice crystalsâ€"and it made that funny smile again.

And in that instant, Elsa knew for sureâ€|

_"__You're never going back._
>The past is in the past!"

This magnificent creature would never again be limited by the ground. This was the beginning of a new lifeâ€"for both of them, in fact. Her own life would never be the same. This was no longer just a dragon. It was her dragon. Their destinies were forever intertwined, and nothing could separate them now.

Nothing would separate them now.

_"__Let it go, let it go,_
>And you'll rise like the break of dawn!
>Let it go, let it go,
>That fearful girl is gone!"

The dragon climbed again, passing through a cloud. When they came out of it, Elsa saw the moon shining brighter than ever, and she almost felt like she could touch it.

_"__Here you stand,_
>Near a thousand stars!
>Let your wings unfold!"

The dragon roared mightily as Elsa's song reached its peak.

_"'__Cause dragons are meant to be soaring high.__

"Come on, girl," she told the dragon. "There's something I'd like you to see which I'm sure you're going to love."

* * *

><p>As the Ice Fury and its new rider flew away, a masked figure observed them from the shadows, concealed by one of the clouds that still covered the land after so many days of rain and snow. Whatever this singular person with powers over the elements had done, it had worked. The white dragon had finally opened its wings and returned to the sky where it belonged.<p>

Now things would be a lot easier for her.

She made the slightest of gestures and disappeared into the night sky.

* * *

><p>AN: Oooohhh, the mystery! Who could that masked figure be? (I can hear you say, "Like we didn't know already", you know.)

>

Sorry for the long delay. This chapter turned out to be longer than I expected as I was writing it. I did include the word "maybe" in my statement of last week when I said I'd upload it on Monday or Tuesday, didn't I? Also, as you can see, **"Let It Go" has to be one of my favorite movie songs ever, and I had to include it here somehow. ****Readapting it to fit it into the story wasn't easy, but I think it was worth the effort.**

**If you had any trouble imagining the scene, here's a link to a video I made with the instrumental version so you can sing along... sort of: [www. youtube watch?v=FGnWyhLXfCI](http://www.youtube/watch?v=FGnWyhLXfCI) (no spaces). I didn't record the lyrics because I don't have the proper equipment to do so, and my manly voice would've been completely out of place anyway. If any of you has the equipment and the voice and feels in a mood to try and record the lyrics, feel free to do so. Just PM me before so I know you're doing it. ;)
>

Oh my, 12 reviews for Chapter 6 so far! I never imagined this story would be so popular. Now, let's get to the replies:

**Cry-Pom:**** Thanks, I'm glad you like it.

>White Hunter:_ *****Thanks.***** Soon we will learn why the dragon didn't want to fly, but at least now it does.

>RedApple435:_** Yeah, I couldn't help the cliffy last time, and now you know what's made this chapter special.** I hope you enjoyed it.

>UnknownBlackHand:_** **Wow, thanks****, I am absolutely flattered.**** As you can see, Valka will appear very soon, and as for Sigurd... well, let's just say things aren't what they seem when it comes to that guy.

>_**HardWrapping:**_** Don't worry, it happens to me as well sometimes, and thanks!**

>Jenson22:_** Thank you! Yeah, Elsa will be blown aw*****a*****y***** when she sees the dragon sanctuary.**.. but that won't happen until we get to the second part, I'm afraid.

>Crystal12:_** Thanks, I will!**

>Sourpatchkids:_** Thank you! Elsa will name the dragon on the next chapter, don't worry.**

>Tsamoka:_** Thanks, I'm glad you like it.**

>Guest:_** Thank you for the suggestions, and no, I'm afraid Elsa won't be paired with anyone in this story. Like I said before, I'm leaving canon pairings untouched.** However, I do have plans for a sequel/spin-off/thing/I-still-don't-know-how-to-call-it where she will be paired with someone... but we're getting way ahead of ourselves here.

>PascalDragon:_** Oh, Sigurd will most definitely get his behind kicked in a couple more chapters.** Thanks, Sven!

>magiclover13:_** Haha, thank you! I think that's _the_ most engouraging review I've read so far (don't get me wrong, everyone else, I love your reviews, but this one was special).** I hope you loved this chapter.
>

I must add that including the song "Let It Go" was not an original idea of mine. I imagine a lot of people may've done by now, but I owe the idea to one fic in particular, called "The Snow Queen" by Zerlinda. I strongly recommend her stories! You can find them in my favorites tab on my profile page. (And on a side note to all Jelsa shippers like me: yeah, that's a ROTGxFrozen crossover, and one of the best I've read.)

Chapter 8 should be ready by Monday (for real this time), so sit tight. In the meantime...

Dont forget to review on your way out!

**P.S.: To all my followers in the US, I really envy you right now. I still have to wait another week before HTTYD2 is released in my country. Please, make your reviews spoiler-free; I've already made the mistake of searching on Google news for anything on the movie and learned that... well, I won't mention it either to avoid spoiling those who haven't watched it. The point is, don't tell me the movie

yet, _please_! Thank you.**

8. Treason

"So, what will you name it? Candy? Truffle?" Anna inquired, her arms crossed, looking at the dragon as it jumped all around the fountain in the Ice Palace's main hallâ€”with Olaf on its back.

Elsa gave her a double-take. "Seriously, Anna? What kind of a name would that be for a dragon?"

"You named your bodyguard Marshmallow."

"Olaf named him Marshmallow."

"And you created Olaf who kind of impersonates your repressed childish personality, so in an indirect sort of wayâ€”"

Elsa chuckled. "Alright, you win. Still, a dragon needs a strong name, not a funny one."

"Says who?"

"It's a _dragon_."

"So?" Anna shrugged.

"Just humor me, please."

"Trust me, I'd agree with you if this dragon didn't behave like a puppy."

Elsa opened her mouth to speak but ultimately said nothing. Anna was right. It was as if the dragon hadn't just let go of its fear to fly but also of its somewhat feral nature. It had been fascinated by the Ice Palace upon their arrival there. And by Olaf. _And_ by Marshmallow. She caught a glimpse of the hulking snowman as he stood guard at the Palace door, watching his 'little brother'â€”as Olaf liked to sayâ€”playing with the dragon. There was a very faint smile on his face. Elsa giggled; he looked ridiculously funny with her old crown on his head.

Kristoff and Sven were nowhere to be seen. The reindeer would be waiting outside, unable to climb the staircase that led to the Palace, and Kristoffâ€”well, his jaw had dropped when he saw the dragon, sure, but his real passion was ice, and up to this day he hadn't really had the chance to take a tour around the Palace. He'd probably be admiring one of the spare rooms and caressing the 'flawless' ice. _As long as he doesn't get any funny ideas, like cutting and selling the walls._

"Okay, a strong nameâ€”" Anna thought out loud. "How about 'Icewing'?"

"That sounds better than 'Truffle', at least."

Anna narrowed her eyes at her. "You don't like it, though."

How can you always see through me so well? "It's not that I _don't_"

like it. It's just thatâ€¦ I don't know."

"You're not convinced. Don't worry, I get it," Anna shrugged it off. However, Elsa was able to notice her indifference. In fact, while Anna had been awestruck to see her arrive at the Palace on the back of a dragon, she didn't look as excited as Elsa was. She wasâ€¦ serious, almost sad. She wasn't like that, and it worried Elsa.

"Anna, are you alright?" she asked her.

"Yeah, sure," Anna replied, smiling. But her smile was weak. Elsa put a hand on her sister's shoulder.

"I know you're not," she told her. Anna didn't bother to reply or even shrug it off again. "Anna, talk to me."

Anna looked away. She opened her lips several times, apparently trying to find the right words, but then she shook her head. "Never mind. It doesn't matter."

But it did matter to Elsa. It occurred to her that maybe having to face Sigurd had been more for Anna than she could ask for. No. That's not it. She faced a harder challenge when trying to bring me back home. Or maybeâ€¦ Maybe Elsa had been so crazy about the dragon that Anna could now be thinking that she was shutting her out againâ€¦ trading her for the dragon. Her keeping the secret from Anna surely wasn't helping the situation. And that was the reason why she hated doing it. But she had done so to protect her, and Anna had apparently accepted that just a few hours ago, so why was she acting like this now?

"So, what now?" Anna asked just as Elsa was about to speak, taking away the chance to ask her about it.

Elsa sighed. "Sigurd doesn't know that I helped the dragon escapeâ€¦ I think. So maybe that could work to our advantage."

"What do you mean?"

"He claimed that I had been taken and killed by the monster. Let's play along with that. When you return to the castle, start taking charge of things like I'm never coming back. Hopefully, now that their 'monster' is gone, Sigurd will leave in less than a day."

"I assume you'll return once he does."

"I'll wait here a few days, just to be on the safe side, but yes. You won't have to worry about handling a kingdom for long."

Anna nodded, still serious. "Well, in that case, I'd better get Kristoff, and we'd better be going before Sideburns returns to Arendelle." She patted Elsa on the back and gave her another faint smile. "Take care."

Elsa didn't respond. Anna was really distraught, that much was obvious. She wanted to reassure her that she loved her and ever would, and simple words wouldn't be enough to prove it right now, so she decided to do something that normally Anna would do.

She rushed to squeeze her sister from behind.

"Thank you, Anna," she said.

Visibly taken by surprise, Anna said, "For what?"

"For everything you did for me when my powers became known. It's been a year and I still hadn't thanked you properly."

Anna shrugged, still wrapped around Elsa's arms. "It was nothing, really."

"No, it was," Elsa said, letting go of her sister and looking her in the eye. "When I was trying to help the dragon fly, I realized how hard it was for youâ€"all that you had to do just for me. I owe you my life, Anna."

Anna's lips quivered for a moment. "Oh, don't be so dramatic. It was nothing compared to what you had to endure all those years, staying in your room all the time to avoid hurting me again. I mean, it was hard for me when I didn't know, but nowâ€"|" She paused. "Come to think of it, I haven't thanked you properly, either. You sacrificed everything for meâ€"your childhood, your lifeâ€"|" Then she scoffed and mumbled, "Of course, if Mom and Dad hadn't taken such drastic measures, we might've discovered sooner that love was the key."

Elsa was able to hear that despite Anna's low voice, but her mind was on something else she'd mentioned. "Did you say 'again'?"

"What?"

"You said 'to avoid hurting me again', but I neverâ€"|" Her voice trailed off when Anna gave her a 'Seriously?' look, and then it dawned on Elsa. "Youâ€"|" know?"

"Of course I know," Anna replied. "My white lock of hair disappears mysteriously after my heart is thawed? It wasn't too hard to put two and two together." She fidgeted a little and smiled apologetically. "That, andâ€"|" Grand Pabbie might have restored my childhood memories a few days ago, before all this madness started. Kind of like an anniversary present for his future daughter-in-law."

Elsa was at a loss. "Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't you?" Anna countered.

"Because the Troll King said that you weren't supposed to know. That's why he removed your memories of my magic in the first place."

"But that was before you learned how to control your powers. You didn't have to keep it in secret anymore, just like you didn't have to keep this little scheme of yours from me."

Elsa didn't know what to say. Now she understood why Anna was being so indifferent with her. It had nothing to do with her giving the dragon so much attention. No, the reason why Anna was upset, and maybe even disappointed, was because she'd been waiting for Elsa to come clean about her secretâ€"to trust her, just like Elsa had asked

Anna to do the sameâ€"and she hadn't.

"You know," Anna continued, "for so many years I wondered why you'd shut me out. I didn't know if it was because I'd done something wrong to you without knowing and you hated me for it, or because I didn't like you as your sister anymore and you were simply trying to act like I didn't exist, or something else. All I knew is that I'd lost my sister, maybe forever. Learning about your powers was one of the best things that could've happened to me because everythingâ€"or most of it, at leastâ€"made sense now, and it only got better when Pabbie helped me remember. I was so happy to know that you'd had no other choice but to conceal it, because it meant that your shutting me out had nothing to do with me and that you did love me, enough to stay away from me to avoid hitting me again with your powers.

"But then, you start acting weird again, and this time I really don't know why. And the worst thing is I probably wouldn't have realized it until it was too late and I had lost you for real, again not knowing what it was that I did wrong." A tear rolled down Anna's cheek, and Elsa shed one of her own.

"Oh, Anna," she said, holding her sister's hands. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry I had to lie to you, and I'm sorry I didn't trust you. I should've known better than that. I should've trusted you. Please, forgive me. I promise I will trust you from now on and never again lie to you."

Anna wiped the tear from her face. "You promise?"

"I promise, Anna," Elsa said and embraced her sister again. "I love you. I'm sorry if I made you doubt that, but I will do everything I can so that you don't ever doubt it again."

Elsa felt her sister smile on her shoulder as she squeezed her gently. "I love you too, Elsa. Just, please, don't keep any secret from me again, no matter how much you may think it will affect me. You don't have to protect me all the time; I can handle myself. I survived a winter gale of your own making. I can survive learning a secret."

They both chuckled, but then Elsa blinked. "What did you just say you survived?"

"A winter gale. You know, everybody keeps saying it was a blizzard, but I think that's exaggerated."

"No, it's not that," Elsa said, letting go of Anna who raised an eyebrow at the excitement etched on Elsa's face. She obviously didn't understand what Elsa meant until the latter gestured at the playful dragon. Then Anna looked at Elsa with a knowing look and a wide smile.

"Wintergale!" they exclaimed in unison.

The dragon instantly stopped in its tracks, looking at the two sisters.

"Do you like it?" Elsa said. "Do you like that nameâ€"Wintergale?"

The dragon wagged its tail and hopped towards Elsa, smiling and with Olaf still on its back. It didn't knock her over, having stopped short from doing so, but its face did come only a few inches from Elsa's face.

"Then Wintergale it is," Elsa said, patting and caressing the dragon's head. She looked again at Anna who seemed in shock.

"It's it's" she stammered, pointing at the dragon.

"Smiling?" Elsa completed the sentence. "Yeah, she is."

Anna laughed and shook her head, smiling just as widely as Wintergale was. "I can't believe it," she said. Then she looked at Elsa with begging eyes. "Can I can I touch her?"

Elsa grinned. "Sure, go ahead."

Anna lifted a shaking hand, slowly, while Wintergale tilted her head slightly to the right. Elsa chuckled and took her sister's hand, guiding it to Wintergale's nose. Anna giggled nervously.

"It feels so cool," she said.

"Yes, it does," Elsa agreed.

It didn't take long for Anna to lose her unease. Soon she was patting and caressing Wintergale just like Elsa had. "She's beautiful," she said. Then, more seriously but not upset, she added, "Despite everything, I'm glad you did what you did. She was definitely worth saving."

Elsa was touched by this comment. "Thanks, Anna."

Anna smiled.

* * *

><p>By the time Anna and Kristoff were back at Arendelle, it was nearly dawn. If Sigurd had already returned by now, he'd probably be displeased to see that she had ignored his will. She didn't care. If anything, it made her feel satisfied, for it had been well worth it. Talking to Elsa had been quite comforting, and being able to help her was even more so. Wintergale, of course, was incredible, and maybe Elsa would one day invite her to fly along with them, but for now she was content with having her sister back.<p>

Kristoff took the sled to the part of the stable reserved for Arendelle's Ice Master and Deliverer. Once he'd helped Anna out of it and Olaf had hopped out as well, he parked it properly and released Sven. Olaf was beaming, perhaps even more than Anna herself.

"You look more happy than usual, Olaf," Anna told the snowman. "Did you enjoy riding on Wintergale's back?"

"Yeah, it was awesome!" he replied. "I really liked her."

"I'm sure she liked you, too."

"You too look happy."

Anna's smile grew. "I am."

"I told you that Elsa loved you," Kristoff said behind her. "But I guess you needed to hear it straight from her."

"It's always nice to get a little reassurance."

"Well, I'm glad you two were able to sort things out. And I'm glad to have my girlfriend back," he said, giving her a small kiss on the lips.

"Hey, I never left!" she exclaimed.

"You were kinda out of character for a while."

"That's not true," Anna replied, but then she reconsidered. "Okay, maybe a little."

"I'm always right."

"Don't push it," she said, finally returning the kiss. When they separated their lips from each other's, she beckoned Olaf with one hand.

"Actually, I think I'll stay here for a while with Sven," Olaf said. "I'd like to tell him everything about Wintergale."

Anna and Kristoff exchanged looks, and they both shrugged. "Sure, knock yourself out, buddy," Kristoff told him. "We'll leave the door open for you."

"Thanks!" Olaf exclaimed then turned around and rushed to where Sven was now lying. "Hey, Sven, guess what?"

Kristoff and Anna chuckled and left the stables. They walked hand in hand, slowly, both of them smiling but neither of them saying a word. It took them about ten more minutes to get to the castle. The gates were open, just like they used to be before Sigurd's arrival, which meant that Sideburns and his henchmen were still gone.

But there was something else about the castle. It looked dark. There wasn't a single light on. When they entered the castle proper, it was utterly silent. There should already be some servants and maids awake by now, opening the windows and curtains and cleaning the empty hallways. And yet, after walking deeper into the castle through those hallways, it was obvious that there wasn't a single soul here. Something wasn't right.

"You know," an eerily familiar voice said among the darkness when they reached another corridor, startling her, "a princess shouldn't be out in the forest at this time of night. It's dangerous."

With that, out of nowhere, a bunch of soldiers armed with crossbows appeared and surrounded them. Then, Sigurd himself came out of the shadows with a smug look on his face.

"What is the meaning of this?" Anna demanded angrily.

"Oh, don't worry, Princess. I'm not taking over your boring little kingdom. This is just a desperate measure for a desperate time."

"What are you talking about?" This is straight up treason!" Kristoff said.

"Aw, look at this. The Princess' peasant boyfriend steps up to defend her," Sigurd mocked, walking calmly around them. "Don't waste your breath. I get the feeling that this Princess can defend herself. Can't you, Your Highness?"

Anna glared at Sideburns as he walked around her and caught a glimpse of Olaf walking down the hallway they'd just left. None of Sigurd's men seemed to notice.

"What do you gain by trying to capture the Princess of Arendelle?!" she yelled at the top of her lungs, hoping that Olaf would catch her drift, despite his innocent nature. She silently breathed in relief when she saw that the snowman was quickly behind the threshold of the door that divided the hallway.

Sigurd, meanwhile, didn't lose his smirk. "Don't waste your time calling for help. None of your servants will come to your aid, much less your Royal Guards."

Anna gasped. "What did you do to them?"

"They're still alive, if that's what you're concerned about. Whether they _stay_ alive is entirely up to you."

"Where are they?"

"Let's just say that this kingdom's dungeons have never been so populated."

Anna wanted to jump past the barrier of soldiers to punch Sigurd in the face, but she refrained herself from doing so. "Why are you doing this?"

Sigurd shrugged. "I just want to be sure that I'm holding all the cards when I come face to face with the Snow Queen."

So, he knows, Anna thought. Still, she tried to play dumb. "She's alive?" she asked, feigning surprise and hope.

"I believe so, yes. In fact, I no longer think the monster caught her." If Sigurd was playing along or didn't really know about Elsa and was waiting for Anna to slip something, she couldn't tell.

"You mean she killed it?"

Sigurd scoffed. "You see, that monster never did things differently before. It was almost like a routine, which is what allowed me to catch up with it faster each time. Had it kept doing everything the same way, I would've been able to capture it the next time it attacked another town, or maybe even here.

"But then, the monster started to behave differently. That had me frustrated for several days, until your people told me of the caves.

You know what I found there? Ice and snow. A _lot_ of snow. But the monster wasn't there, and you know why? Because it _flew_ away. It had never flown before. It always ran from town to town, but it never flew until now. That got me thinking. What was different about this place that could've made the monster change so much? And that's when I realized. It's not a matter of 'what' but of 'whom'."

Sigurd finally stopped walking in circles and stared directly into Anna's eyes. "Your sister, the _Snow_ Queen. The monster didn't capture her. _She_ went with it. She's _helping_ it."

Anna couldn't speak. Was this man really going for that argument? Two of his soldiers made way for him to walk closer to Anna. He placed a finger under her chin and forced her face up. Anna felt sick.

"I suppose it takes a monster to help a monster," he said, his arrogant smile still drawn across his face.

Anna knew she had to protect Elsa and Wintergale at all costs, and maybe trying to act like she really didn't know what was happening would help. Right now, the best way to achieve this was to let her anger and hatred for this man get the best of her, so she did the one thing she never imagined she'd do.

She spat him on the face.

"You're insane," she hissed. "First you say that my sister is dead, and now you say that she is a monster helping another monster. Which one is it?"

Sigurd wiped the spit from his face, that annoying smile finally gone. "You tell me."

She furrowed her brow. "I've been away from this castle for the last six hours, trying to find a way to cope with the loss of my sisterâ€"something _you_ told me happenedâ€"and now I'm supposed to believe that she's a traitor?"

"I never said that. Your sister may just beâ€| misguided. For decades she's believed that she's the only one out there with ice powers, and then she has an encounter with a creature possessing similar abilities. It is understandable that she would empathize with it, but though she may have tamed it for now, a beast will always be a beast. Nature always wins." He smirked again. "I'm not the bad guy. I'm trying to save people, including your sister. She doesn't know what she's gotten herself into."

"You don't really expect me to believe that, do you?" Anna said, her words laced with venom.

Sigurd chuckled. "Not really. But that's the story I'll tell people later on. Simple folks are more gullible than you are. The point is, I'll find that monster and slay it, and anyone who stands in my way will meet the same fate. Still, if I tell the Queen that her beloved sister's life hangs by a thread, she might feel inclined to relinquish the beast, provided that I present her with evidence of my words. Wouldn't you agree?"

If he even suspects that you know something, he could use you against me, and if he didâ€|

Elsa's words echoed inside Anna's mind. She'd been right to try and protect her, after all. But now she was knee-deep in this mess, and the best she could do was to prove her own worth and that she could handle herself, just like she'd told Elsa. "Even if you're right and my sister's still alive, and helping the monster, you'll have to find her first. And if you do, I seriously doubt she'll meet your demands. You don't know her like I do."

Sigurd straightened. "For your own sake, I hope you're wrong. As for finding her, I already know where she is. I've got to say, if I were the Snow Queen, the last place where I'd hide an ice monster would be my Ice Palace."

Anna's eyes widened. How could you know that?_, she wanted to ask. But she didn't. Mostly because she feared that it would give her away, and also because she recalled Elsa mentioning her encounter with the Duke of Weselton's thugs, which made the question pointless. Not making it, however, turned out to be a mistake.

"I find your silence encouraging, Princess," Sigurd said, walking behind her. He pulled out a knife from his belt, grabbed both of Anna's pigtails, and cut them all at once. Kristoff was about to tackle and hit him, but one of the soldiers knocked him out with the butt of his crossbow.

"Kristoff!" Anna yelled, kneeling to tend to him.

"This will do nicely," Sigurd said, holding Anna's hair in his hand. "We shall see who of us is right. In the meantimeâ€¦"

He ordered his soldiers to take Anna and Kristoff to the Queen's room and to ensure that she stayed there, and then he left. As the men escorted them away, Anna looked over her shoulder to make sure that Sigurd didn't run into the hiding snowman and felt a little better after seeing that he didn't. The soldiers dragged Kristoff all the way to Elsa's room and dropped him there. They aimed their weapons at Anna and motioned for her to get inside. She didn't challenge them, being more worried about Kristoff than about making an impression. The soldiers closed the door and locked it, leaving only Anna and Kristoff in the room.

Anna knelt again by Kristoff's side. "Kristoff, please wake up," she said, shaking him.

Kristoff groaned and took a hand to his head. "That guy has a heavy hand," he said. Then, looking at Anna, he added, "You look a lot like your cousin Rapunzel right now."

Anna let out a breath of relief. She helped him on his feet and to the bed. Then they both jumped when they heard a loud thud on the window. She ran to it and opened it to find Olaf's headâ€”just the headâ€”smashed against the glass.

"Hey! Are you guys okay?" he said, his voice muffled as his mouth was against the window. Anna detached him from it.

"We're fine, Olaf," she whispered, to which Kristoff groaned again. "Well, he's a little banged up. What about you?"

"I'm great," Olaf said, smiling. _Does anything ever faze this little snowman?_

"That's good. I was worried about you."

"Hey, no need to worry. Sideburns didn't see me. He left the castle in a hurry and headed for the woods."

"Probably to rendezvous with the rest of his soldiers," Kristoff considered. "Have you encountered any more of his men here in the castle, aside from the ones guarding this room?"

"Nope."

"Still, it would be hard to keep all our servants and Royal Guards under lock and key without enough people to keep an eye on them," Anna said. "Sigurd's men total a little over 200. If I were him, I'd split them and leave half of them here to keep things under control while he and the rest go to the North Mountain."

"I didn't know you were such a great strategist," Kristoff said.

"I'm not. Who said that was a strategy? All I'm saying is that that's what I'd do." Then Anna realized something. "How did your head end up here anyway, Olaf? Where's the rest of your body?"

"Down there in the courtyard," Olaf replied, gesturing outside with his eyes. Anna looked down to the courtyard, and true enough, Olaf's body was sitting there, his parts rearranged in such a way that it looked like some sort of catapult. She giggled. It was funny to see him like this.

"Okay, Olaf, I need you to do something for me. You must goâ€" "

"Warn Elsa about Sideburns!" Olaf exclaimed. "Finally! I thought you'd never ask."

Anna smiled. "You already know how to get there. Go get Sven. You'll be able to get to the Palace faster on his back. Try to avoid the main road, and whatever you do, don't let Sigurd and his men spot you."

"Got it," Olaf winked. He seemed to be waiting for something else to happen. Eventually, he said, "Um, Anna? Would you please throw my head back to my body?"

"Oh, right!" Anna said. She aimed carefully at the uneven lump of snow down in the courtyard and threw Olaf's head as hard as she could. It landed right on top of his body. He rearranged his parts again and ran away, only looking back to wave at Anna and give her a thumbs-up. She sighed, hoping that the diminutive snowman would be able to get to Elsa in time.

"Hey," Kristoff said, "that was amazing."

"Huh?" Anna replied, losing her train of thought.

"What you did back there. You showed Sigurd who's in charge."

"Not really," Anna said, still looking outside. Olaf was gone by now.

"Not really? You would've punched his teeth out of his mouth if there hadn't been any soldiers between you and he, just like you did Hans."

Anna shrugged. "Promise me you'll never grow sideburns."

They looked at each other and began laughing. Or rather, guffawing. It was a full-blown laughter that went on for a good five minutes until they cried. Then she stared outside her window and saw a massive shadow flying away in the distance. It was extremely fast, for all it took for it to disappear from Anna's view was a blink of an eye. She noticed that it didn't look like Wintergale at all. This flying creature had to be at least twice as big.

Could it be yet another dragon?

Whatever it was, Anna was certain of at least one thing. That creature was heading to the North Mountain.

* * *

><p>AN: I'm really, really sorry about the delay. Not only was this week busier than I thought it would be, but also my entire neighborhood has been having constant blackout issues because of the whacky weather in my country and thus, whenever I did have power, I had to make use of my computer to do my homework. Here's hoping that the weather improves in the next few days so that I won't have the same problem again.
>

HTTYD2 was finally released in my country three days ago! I watched it on Friday... and I cried. A lot. Wasn't really sure of how to adapt my storyline to make it fit into the events of the film, but I finally got that sorted out. I'm glad to announce that this fic will be made up of 29 chapters total, with "Part One" ending at Chapter 11 (yeah, we're almost there), and "Part Two" beginning at Chapter 12, obviously. I'll try to update both parts as regularly as possible, but let me tell you in advance that there might be a two-week hiatus between Parts One and Two. The thing is, I've neglected my HaloxSGA crossover, and I really want to finish that, or at least to update one or two more chapters, before continuing with this.

I must say, I've been blown away. When I readapted "Let It Go", I never expected it to have such a positive response! Thank you all for leaving such wonderful reviews! Now, let's get on with the replies:

****_**magiclover13:**_** Thank you! I'm glad you liked the song and the bond between Elsa and Wintergale**.

>Pabulover123:_** Trust me, it wasn't easy for me figuring out how to incorporate them. I'm glad you liked the song, thank you!

>PascalDragon:_** *****My chapter made your Saturday night? In that case, your review made

mine! Hehe, thank you for your comments, and I agree, that would definitely be awesome. **I hope you haven't fallen to the temptation of reading about the whole movie plot on Wikipedia or the HTTYD Wiki, 'cause despite the major spoiler floating around the Web, there are still a lot of things that might surprise you about the film which aren't quite as enjoyable once you know them in advance.*****
Thanks, Sven!

>RedApple435:_** Possibly..**.

>*****_**White Hunter:**_ *****I hope you like the name Elsa and Anna came up with for the Ice Fury****.

>*****_**YouNameIt:**_** I'm glad to know that the scene was easy to picture. I wanted to give more details about the trio reaction, but for some reason I couldn't quite get it to work. Still, I hope you liked this chapter, and thank you!**

>alive-in-us:_** Thanks! At first, I was absolutely adamant to make it Hiccelsa, but now that I've seen the film..*****. I'm still considering it. Not sure yet.

>Guest:_** You'll get more, don't worry.

>Peach 3:_** Thank you. Like I mentioned above, still not sure.*****

>*****_**UnknownBlackHand:**_** **Huh, hadn't thought about it that way****. I hope you liked the surprise, then.

>Dragonfan47:_** Maybe... *****

>*****_**Crystal12:**_** Thank you!** I'm really flattered. I'm afraid Hiccup won't appear for another while. You see, I don't like jumping the gun to get to the "interesting part" of a story. I prefer to establish a really good backstory, which is what I hope makes this fic special and interesting to read. Still, I'm also looking forward to that meeting.

>Guest:_** That's an interesting name. I've already named it, as you can see, but thank you for the suggestion*****. Perhaps *****I can use that name in the future *****if Toothless and Wintergale have babies. As for Hiccup and Valka, she will appear shortly, but Hiccup won't show up soon, like I said above.

>*****_**Sephiroth Crescent-Valentine:**_** Like I mentioned above, it will be a while.**** But don't worry, it will be something nice when we get to that.**

>Guest:_** Again, sorry about the delay*****.***** It was because of things beyond my control.

>**

****I'm replying to each anonymous guest review as if they are from different people. Unfortunately, the latest such review contained virtually _every_ spoiler of HTTYD2, so even though I had already watched the film and knew about them, there are still a lot of people who haven't watched it, so I had no other choice but to delete that comment. Please, if you leave a review, make it spoiler-free; be considerate of those who haven't watched it.****

****Under the current conditions, I can't make any promises to upload soon, but I'll do my best to write and upload it fast. Until then...****

****Don't forget to review on your way out!****

9. The Second Assault on the Ice Palace

The sunrays of dusk began painting the clouds with red and pink pastels, turning the sky into a beautiful scene that any master painter would love to capture— from Arendelle, at least. It didn't help much in diminishing the menacing environment that surrounded the North Mountain, though. The swirling clouds above its peak expelled a mild flurry of snowflakes, and on the mountain side where night was already falling, blackness replaced their natural whiteness and blended with the few traces of pink.

The last time a scene like this had been formed, it had been as a result of Elsa's powers responding to her distress after learning of the eternal winter she'd unleashed.

Elsa walked to the balcony to get some fresh air—and she sighted a group of people closing in on the Palace. A large group of armed men. If she had to guess, she'd say that those were Sigurd's men, quite possibly led by Sigurd himself. Does he ever stop being so annoying?

Unlike the small group that Hans had brought here a year ago, this bunch of soldiers were too noisy. They hadn't even reached the Palace's staircase when Marshmallow awoke to the racket of metal against metal from the soldiers' armors and weapons. He roared in an attempt to scare the soldiers away, but that only encouraged them to charge against him.

"Marshmallow, stop!" Elsa commanded from the balcony. The last thing she needed was for him to get his leg severed from his body—again. "Let these people through. They're guests."

Marshmallow looked briefly at Elsa who gave him a nod as her final confirmation. Then the gigantic snowman returned to his original position—curled up beside the staircase. The man leading the soldiers sheathed his sword and looked up to the Palace's balcony. It was definitely Sigurd; those sideburns were unmistakable.

"Captain Sigurd! I was under the impression that you were hunting down a monster. What brings you here to the North Mountain, exclusive domain of the Snow Queen of Arendelle?"

Sigurd curtsied; whether mockingly or for real, Elsa couldn't tell. "It is precisely my quest that brings me here, Your Majesty, as well as a request from your people and your sister who is terribly concerned about your well-being. We all believed that you were dead, taken by the ice monster during one of your escapades."

Elsa noticed that he didn't seem mad about that last part. "I would apologize about leaving the safety of my castle during the curfew, but as we have already established, neither you nor I answer to each other. Nevertheless, and seeing as how you are already here, I welcome you to my Ice Palace. Please, feel free to cross the gates

and make yourselves comfortable. I shall join you shortly."

"We appreciate your hospitality, Your Highness," Sigurd replied, bowing again before approaching the Palace. Elsa walked back inside and down the stairs to the Main Hall while Sigurd and his small army entered the Palace two by two.

"Forgive me if the staircase is less spacious than the bridge that leads to Arendelle's castle. When I first built this place, I was not planning on having any visitors," she said.

Sigurd walked up the curving staircase and approached her. "Where is it?" he asked menacingly.

"The staircase? You justâ€"

"You know exactly what I mean. Where are you hiding it?"

"Captain, I really don'tâ€"

"Stop playing games!" he exclaimed. "I know you helped it escape!"

Elsa was unfazed by Sigurd's outburst. "The last time you yelled at me and nearly killed me, I let it slip because, as you yourself said, the laws of my kingdom prevented me from taking any person's life by my own hand," she said in a low, calm voice. "But here, in this mountainâ€"my kingdom of isolationâ€"those laws don't apply. So, let me ask you this, and pay attention because I will only say it once. Do you really want to challenge the Snow Queen in her own dominion?"

Sigurd held his sword high, but Elsa noticed the slight quiver in his hand. "Very well, if that's how you want itâ€|"

Elsa raised her hand slightly, getting ready to defend herself if it came to that. Instead, Sigurd sheathed his sword and straightened himself. "I do not care why you left your castle and came here. What I do care about is the ice monster. I have reason to believe that you helped it escape from the cave it was hiding in, and since this is the only other place where you would be if not in your castle, it only stands to reason that you would bring it here."

Elsa glared at him. "I will simply ignore the fact that you just accused me of ensuring the survival of a creature which poses a deadly menace to my people and ask what it is exactly that you are doing here."

"Why, I came to find and slay it, of course. So, if you'd be so kind as to tell us where it isâ€|"

Elsa remained impassible. "Like I was trying to say before, I do not know of what you speak, but I suppose nothing I tell you will convince you otherwise." Sigurd stared at her, smirking. "Very well, if you must, feel free to search every last room in this Palace."

Sigurd's smile almost vanished for a second. Then he turned to his soldiers. "You heard the Queen! Search this entire placeâ€"every room, every corridor, even the roof if needed be," he ordered. The

men began spreading out throughout the Palace.

"It didn't take me a lot of effort to build this place, but I will be most displeased if I have to fix any damage your minions do to it," Elsa told Sigurd. Then she turned around and began walking up the staircase leading to the Heart of the Palace. "I shall be upstairs if you need me."

But Sigurd would have none of it. "You two, go with her," he barked.

Elsa turned to see who he would send with her and nearly laughed out loud when she saw that they were none others than the Duke of Weselton's thugs. Needless to say, both of them were trembling, but they complied. She cast them a glare that would've frozen them right where they stood if possible, just to make sure they didn't get any ideas. When she reached the upper floor, she kept walking towards the balcony. "I shall be out here. Let me know when your Captain is done," she told the two shaking guys before flicking her wrist to make the balcony doors shut. She leaned on the cold railing and let the wintery breeze caress her skin. Then she looked up once more to take in the view.

The last time a scene like this had been formed, it had been as a result of Elsa's powers responding to her distress after learning of the eternal winter she'd unleashed. This time, however, she had consciously summoned such weather in advance. Just one of the many precautions she'd taken for when Sigurd arrived, to try and discourage him and his men.

For this visit hadn't taken her by surprise. On the contraryâ€|

She'd been expecting him.

* * *

><p>6 hours earlier**

Elsa tapped her chin as she studied her latest additionâ€"or rather, adaptationâ€"to the Palace. "Think you'll be able to sleep well in here, Wintergale?"

The dragon crooned and smiled.

"I guess it is close enough to your old lair, don't you think?"

Wintergale hopped into its new 'room' at the very bottom of the Palace in what Elsa liked to call "The Tower"â€"the spacious, taller structure behind the one containing the Palace's Main Hall and Heart. While its original purpose had been mostly to give the Palace an even greater appearance, after the Great Thaw she'd actually built many floors and rooms within it, as well as an entrance behind the Hall's fountain and just below the two curving staircases to allow access to it.

This new section was virtually the same size as the cavern where Elsa had found Wintergale days ago. Elsa had also added a few details, such as ice stalactites and lots of snow, to make it as similar as

possible. The only difference was that the entrance to this lair was not a rocky tunnel but a spiraling ramp wide enough to allow for Wintergale to walk freely through it—and that this place was completely made of ice. It was perfect for Wintergale—and yet, Elsa felt like something else was missing.

"Of course!" she said, snapping her fingers. Then she added one last thing: an opening at the far-end wall that would lead to the back of the Palace and allow Wintergale to come and go at will—flying, of course.

"Now it is perfect for you," she told her dragon.

A soft midday breeze came in through the opening and filled the room, carrying the sound of the wind flowing through the snowy mountains—and the echo of a voice that was calling her name.

Elsa Elsa Elsa

She recognized the voice. "Olaf?"

Elsa!

"That's Olaf, Wintergale!" she exclaimed and rushed back to the Main Hall. She quickly opened the doors to find that, indeed, Olaf and Sven had come to the castle and that he was already talking to Marshmallow. She couldn't make out what he was saying, though. He was speaking faster than she thought possible, and he also looked a bit worried—something extremely unusual of him.

"Elsa!" he said when he looked up to the entrance. Then he went up the stairs in a hurry while Sven and Marshmallow stayed on the other side of the chasm below. "Elsa, you need to get away from here! Sigurd is coming for Wintergale!"

"What?" Again, Elsa struggled to understand the snowman at first, but then the words slowly made sense. "Sigurd?"

"Yeah. He's imprisoned the Royal Guards and servants in the dungeons and is keeping Anna and Kristoff under guard in the castle. Elsa, he knows that you're here! You and Wintergale need to leave!" The information was coming from his mouth so fast Elsa couldn't even process it all at once, but the part about Anna immediately caught her full attention.

"Okay, slow down, Olaf. One thing at a time," Elsa said. "First, where are Anna and Kristoff?"

"Sigurd locked them in your room in the castle. Elsa, the guy is crazy! He believes that you helped the monster escape. He had Kristoff beaten and almost tortured Anna to make her confess! Well, not really, but I saw that he had a knife in his hand and then he—Elsa?"

She didn't reply right away. Her knees had nearly buckled upon hearing about Anna. It was one thing that Sigurd had nearly killed Elsa, but that he'd tried to do the same thing to Anna—Had she failed to protect her by involving her in all this?

Snow began falling all around her. She needed to remain calm—for

Anna. "Please tell me she's okay."

"Yeah, she's fine, and so is Kristoff. They're just Sigurd's prisoners right now. He's the one you should be worried about."

That's the biggest understatement I've ever heard. "How could he know about my Palace, anyway?"

"I'm not sure, but he wasn't bluffing when he said that he knew. He left half of his soldiers in Arendelle and took the rest with him. Sven and I have spent the last day trying to avoid them while on our way here, and I can tell you that he's on the right track. I was hoping to get here sooner, but the guy and his soldiers move really fast! I feared we wouldn't get to you in time."

"It's okay, Olaf. You did a great job. Now relax while I think of something."

Elsa didn't even want to ask how much time she had before Sigurd's arrival. The last thing she needed was to become more stressed. Just like her powers, the Heart of the Palace was already reacting to her emotions. Even from down here, she could see the reflection of red light on the ice. She heard the sound of heavy footsteps behind her which she knew belonged to Wintergale. The dragon walked up to her side and growled softly with its head tilted to its side.

"Don't worry, girl," Elsa told her, lifting up a hand and putting atop Wintergale's head. "He won't harm you. I promise."

But could she keep such a promise when her sister's life was in the balance?

It was clear that her original plan had gone awry. With Sigurd already on his way here, there was no point in keeping the charade any more. She would either have to flee far, far away with Wintergale—which could turn out to be death sentence for Anna—or stay and fight and hope that she would be able to defeat no less than a hundred armed men _without_ killing any of them. After her experience with the Duke's bodyguards last year in which she'd almost truly become a monster and a murderer, she'd vowed never again to try and use her powers to take any other person's life, not even Sigurd's—not even when that could save—

Wait.

Perhaps she _could_ still keep the charade. After all, how much could Sigurd actually know? He was aware of her private hideout in the mountains, so what? Maybe all he was trying to do was to prove that she _had_ helped Wintergale escape. He could still need _evidence_.

Well, he wouldn't get it.

Before Sigurd and his army arrived, she could make sure that Wintergale remained hidden in her new lair. All she had to do was to seal the ramp and darken the ice so that nobody would be able to see what was below. No, that was still too risky. What if Wintergale couldn't help making some noise? No, what she really needed to do was to take her away, just as Olaf said—and return to the Palace as

soon as possible. But how? Other than on Wintergale's back, the only way to be back here soon was to ride on Sven's back. She didn't want to imagine how it would affect Kristoff if Sigurd did something to his dear friend out of pure spite.

Sven. She looked down at the reindeer sitting by Marshmallow's side. What if _she_ didn't have to leave the Palace at all? What ifâ€|?

Elsa walked down the staircase and approached the reindeer. "Hey, Sven? Is it possible that you could get to the lake where Kristoff harvests ice on your own?"

The reindeer simply stared at Elsa, his face showing no emotion.

"Come on, Sven. I know you are very smart for a reindeer. Can you get there?"

Sven raised an eyebrow.

"Uh, Elsa?" Olaf said, beckoning her closer. Elsa bent over so that her face was at level with Olaf's. "I think he wants something in return," he whispered into her ear.

"Something in return?" Elsa repeated, also in a low voice.

Olaf squinted, looking to the ground. Elsa frowned, to which Olaf only squinted harder. It took her a while to realize that Olaf wasn't looking at the ground but at his own noseâ€"his _carrot_ nose.

"Oh, that," Elsa thought out loud as she looked again at Sven. _Very smart, indeed._ He was asking for something in exchange for the information she needed. And of course Elsa knew about his love for carrots.

"Alright," she told the reindeer. "I'm sorry, Sven. I don't have any carrot here, but if you help me, I promise to give you an entire crate of carrots when we return to Arendelle.

Sven raised his eyebrow even more.

"Fine, make that three crates."

This time, the reindeer smiled and nodded, hopefully in reply to her original question.

"Good. Do you and Kristoff have some sort of refuge or cave where you can stay in case you get caught in a storm or something?"

Again, the reindeer didn't gesture nor make a noise.

"There will be five crates of delicious carrots waiting at home for you."

The reindeer nodded.

"Perfect. If you can take Olaf and Wintergale there, I'll double the amount of crates," Elsa told him, this time presenting her offer in advance. Sven wagged his tail and stuck his tongue out.

One less problem, at least.

"But what about you, Elsa?" Olaf asked. "Won't you come?"

"No, Olaf. I need to stay."

"Why?"

"To put Sigurd off the scent. When he arrives, I'll welcome him like nothing else is going on here. Aside from me, he'll find an empty Palace and no evidence of Wintergale ever being here. He will have no other choice but to leave and continue his search elsewhere."

"Are you sure?"

She looked up to the distance and sighed. "I've got to at least try."

* * *

><p>Elsa took a deep breath. She'd managed to stay calm during her verbal match with Sigurd, but it had taken a lot. Thus far, focusing on the here and now had helped, and she knew that she needed to keep doing it instead of worrying about Anna, for it was the best way to ensure her sister's safety.

She was certain that the Duke's goons had been the ones to tell Sigurd about this place, since Anna wouldn't have told him in a million years. Now Elsa knew that for a fact. Anna was a lot stronger and braver than she thought. She had to be, if Sigurd had taken such desperate measures like beating Kristoff and threatening to kill Anna and even locking them away. If Olaf said that she was fine, she most definitely was. Still, Elsa needed to make sure that Sigurd left for good this time. He wouldn't bother the people of Arendelle ever again.

The balcony door burst open. "Where did you take it?" Sigurd demanded.

Elsa's grip on the railing tightened for a second. She thought of her sister and how her life depended on her. Taking another deep breath, and without turning around, she replied, "I take it you didn't find what you were looking for."

"Of course I didn't. This place is empty, which begs the question, where did you take it?" Sigurd insisted.

Now Elsa turned around. "You keep claiming that I'm helping this monster you seek, but what evidence do you have of this?"

Sigurd's face reddened. "I don't have any evidence nor I need it. I know that you did it."

"And yet, as you yourself said, this place is empty. There is no monster here, and if you are still here only to complain about it, then I would ask that you leave immediately. I don't have time for bickering."

Sigurd tried to regain his composure. "I would have no problem with

searching everywhere in this kingdom, butâ€" "

"I don't think you understand, _Captain_," Elsa cut him off. "I want you to leave this mountain, and I want you to leave Arendelle. _Now_."

Sigurd seemed unable to reply for a momentâ€| but then he grinned. "No, Your Majesty. I think it's you who doesn't understand. I don't have the time nor the will to waste energy searching for the monster throughout your entire kingdom. Now, tell me where you've hidden it, and I will take what is rightfully mine and leave."

Elsa glared at Sigurd and said nothing.

"I'm impressed, Your Highness," Sigurd said, surprisingly enough not even the slightest hint of sarcasm in his voice. "I've met kings with less strength of will and character than you in my journeys. I could spend here the rest of my life trying to get the information I need out of you, and you would still not say a word." He opened a small leather satchel he was carrying and began searching for something inside of it. "So, perhaps what you need is a little incentive."

To Elsa's horror, he pulled out of the satchel both of Anna's pigtails, holding them right in front of her.

"You obviously recognize whom these belong to," Sigurd said, grinning even more. "Your sister is alive and well, for now. Tell me where you're hiding the monster, and I will let her go."

Elsa's momentary shock quickly became rage. The Heart of the Palace began glowing amber. "You just crossed a line, Sigurd. I was simply trying to scare you before, but now believe me when I tell you that I have no problem with killing you right now."

"Oh, you could do that. In fact, you could kill me and all of my men if you like. But if I don't return to Arendelle within a day, or if any of my men makes it out of this mountain alive and back to the castle to report my demise, your sister will die."

Elsa clenched her fists so hard her arms shook. She had vowed not to kill anyone with her powers, but to protect her loved ones, she was more than willing to break that vow. And yet, this man had just placed her between a rock and a hard place.

She was no longer in control of the situation.

The clouds above became thicker and darker, and the wind began blowing harder all around the Palace, slowly turning into a full-blown blizzard. The Heart of the Palace glowed brighter.

"This display of power will not deter me. You know my conditions. Are you really willing to give up your sister's life to protect a beast?"

Elsa didn't reply.

"Then I guess your sister was right after all," Sigurd concluded. "So be it." He turned around to leave, barking orders to his men as he went.

But Elsa was not about to let this man have the last word. Forgetting about love and focusing all of her anger and hatred, she stomped the icy ground.

Instantly, Sigurd and most of his men became trapped in ice that rose from the ground in the form of icicles around each soldier, effectively immobilizing all of them. Those who had not been trapped ran for cover, unsheathing swords and loading crossbowsâ€"except for the Duke's thugs, who chose to remain hidden and do nothing.

"You shall not lay a finger on my sister!" she exclaimed, walking into the room. She caught a glimpse of one of the soldiers raising his crossbow, and before he could even aim it at her, she shot a burst of ice magic at the weapon and sent it flying out of his hand. Another one tried to attack her from behind, but she spun around and covered the man's sword with so much ice he couldn't hold it for long, and then she sent a gust of wind to knock him off his feet.

No one else dared try another move at her.

Seeing that some of the soldiers had already fled downstairs, she rushed back to the balcony and shouted, "Marshmallow, stop them!"

Without hesitation, the towering snowman rose and moved to block off the soldiers' escape route. She saw him get hit by a volley of arrows and spears, which only served to make him mad. The snowman roared furiously, ice spikes appearing all over his body, but he stayed where he was, knowing that the staircase would be too big for him to move freely and that he would inevitably fall. Thus, neither he nor the soldiers moved.

She was starting to walk backwards when she heard the sound of ice shattering, but before she could turn around, her arms and legs became trapped by a pair of bolas, making her fall to the ground with a loud thud. She tried to free herself from her bindings, but it was pointless. Then she felt a boot on her shoulder that forced her body on her back.

"Well, you do have spunk, I'll give you that," Sigurd said. There was a man with a hammer in his hand and more bolas hanging from his belt beside himâ€"possibly the one who freed Sigurd from the ice. "I guess you leave me no other choice but to get rid of you." He unsheathed his sword and held the tip at Elsa's throat.

But instead of delivering the coup de grace, he knelt by her side and spoke to her ear. "Just so you know, once I return to your castle, I'm going to have a lot of fun with your sister before I kill her too. Poor Princess Anna, so young and full of lifeâ€|"

Elsa twitched this way and that after listening to this. She tried to freeze the ropes, but she couldn't even reach them with the tip of her fingers. Sigurd rose and lifted his sword again, this time ready to stab her with it.

Another loud roar pierced the skyâ€"but it wasn't Marshmallow's. Elsa gasped.

Before Sigurd could react, Wintergale had flown into the room through the open balcony door and knocked him away. The dragon whipped the

other soldier with its tail before standing between a fallen Sigurd and Elsa.

"Wintergale, stop!" Elsa yelled. "Get out of here!"

But the dragon would not leave her side. As Sigurd tried to get back on his feet, Wintergale stood on her hind legs and extended her wings, roaring again mightily.

"Wintergale, forget about him! Just go!"

Sigurd smirked. "Finally," he said.

Wintergale shot a blast of ice at him, but he dodged the shot and rushed to grab a pair of bolas from the other soldier's belt. With two swift moves, he threw one first at Wintergale's forelegs then the other at her hind legs. The dragon fell just as quickly as Elsa had.

"Oh, ho, ho, for once I'm glad you helped it escape," Sigurd said, standing triumphantly and retrieving his sword from the ground. "It seems like this beast has grown fond of you. What a mistake." He walked to the curving staircase leading downstairs and shouted, "Our quest has ended! Come and see the ice monster for what it truly is!"

Most of the soldiers returned to the room hesitantly until they saw Wintergale defeated and fallen. Then they began shouting with joy and calling the rest of the men to come while Sigurd stood in front of Wintergale who, despite being on the ground, still managed to shoot another blast of ice. Sigurd simply dodged it again and moved to its side.

"Leave her alone," Elsa said.

"Her?" Sigurd asked. Then, noticing the saddle, he seemed to understand. "Oh, you've also grown fond of it. It's your pet now," he mocked her. "Then I guess its death will be more painful for you than your own."

Then he turned to the dragon. "You have no idea of all I had to go through to catch you. But finally, it all ends here and now."

He lifted his sword. Wintergale hissed and snarled and twitched, but she was unable to break the ropes binding her. She looked at Elsa.

"I'm sorry," she said, crying.

Then the ceiling began glowing. It wasn't because of Elsa's emotions, though. Something else was making it glow—something—

Sigurd was distracted by it too. Elsa could also hear the crackling sound of—fire?

The glowing stopped just as soon as it had begun. And then, a massive creature came crashing through it, missing the chandelier only by a few inches. It landed gracefully on the floor, barely able to fit in the room, and roared.

Elsa couldn't believe her eyes. _Another dragon?!_

But this one was a lot different from Wintergale. This one was two or three times bigger and had a more muscular and sturdy build. Its owl-like face had two long spines for eyebrows that branched off its nose and to the side, as well as tentacle-like spiked spines behind them. It had no forelegs, but its hind legs were large and strong, and it hadâ€¦ four wings?

And as if the shock wasn't great enough, a masked figure jumped from its backâ€”a human-looking figure. He wore a simple-looking leather armor covered in blue paint on the right side, large armbands with talons above his hands, boots with spikes on the sides, and a red, torn cape. His leather mask was also covered in blue paint and had horns and tusks protruding from all sides. He held a staff with large hooks on each end in his right hand and a shield also made of leather in his left.

Sigurd seemed too scared to say anything for a second, but he quickly recovered. "Get them!" he ordered.

His soldiers raised their swords and crossbows, but the mysterious warrior moved quickly, twirling his staff in his hand and landing one blow after another. He dodged some arrows and blocked the rest with his shield before knocking out the men who had been bold enoughâ€”or dumb enoughâ€”to unload their weapons on him. Then he looked at Sigurd who raised his sword and charged. He swung the blade, trying to hit the warrior, but he was quickly overpowered. With two swift moves, the masked man both disarmed and knocked Sigurd unconscious.

Other soldiers came running to their leader's aid, but the four-winged dragon discouraged them by breathing an intense vortex of fire at the room's entranceâ€”melting some of the ice in the process.

The masked man, meanwhile, hurried to use his staff to cut Wintergale's bindings. He did the same with Elsa's before returning to his dragon's side. The dragon lowered its head and allowed him to climb on top of its neck, and then it used its fire to make yet another hole in the wall, large enough for it to fly through. Elsa fully expected them both to leave, but they just stayed there.

"Who are you?" Elsa asked.

The man neither said a word nor made any gesture, but his lack of communication actually spoke volumes.

He was waiting for her to follow him.

Elsa didn't hesitate to climb onto Wintergale's saddle, and only then did this masked man and his dragon fly out of the room. She would've followed him closely, had she not remembered something.

"Wait!" she shouted. "We have to go for Marshmallow!"

The man didn't seem to care.

"We can't just leave him there!"

The man kept flying away. Elsa saw no other choice but to turn back for her dear bodyguard, and she did. Sigurd's men were still keeping a good distance from him.

"Marshmallow, run!" she told the snowman who immediately complied and jumped down to the woods below. Elsa was about to guide him away when suddenly a pair of large paws grabbed him by the arms.

It was the masked warrior's dragon.

Elsa looked at him with gratitude. "Thank you," she breathed.

The man didn't reply. He and his dragon just turned around and flew further into the mountain range, with Elsa trailing closely behind, their destination unknown to her.

* * *

><p>AN: And this is where the story starts to become an actual HTTYD/Frozen crossover. Aren't you excited?*

In case you're still wondering, that was Valka. I used the pronoun "he" because the chapter was written from an outsider (Elsa's) perspective, and to be honest, Valka's first impression when dressed with her "dragon outfit" isn't exactly that of a woman.

I find myself again blown away by such a possitive response to Wintergale's name! Thank you all for your reviews!

****_*****_**sarah360:**_*****_*****
***** Why, thank you!***** It's
always good to get such nice new reviews.

>*****_**magiclover13:**_** Thank you! Yep, you were right**; it was Cloudjumper. (I know you asked me not to tell you if you were right or wrong, but since this chapter made his appearance quite obvious...) And I'm glad you liked that sister-to-sister talk. :)

>Pabulover123:_** Hehehe, I'm evil! Well, not really, but I couldn't help doing it. And yeah, I guess that's one good lesson to take from this story ;).

>*****_**Crystal12:**_** Thanks!** I'm glad you liked the name. It seems like crying uncontrollably is the general reactuin to HTTYD2. I've just seen it one and I still cry when I remember it. I'm still not sure about Hiccup and Elsa, but Toothless and Wintergale will be mates, that's for sure.

>*****_**White Hunter:**_ *****Thank you. Did you ***like Valka's introduction to this story?

>*****_**Guest:**_** I know. Once again, sorry about that.

>*****_**alive-in-us:**_** Yikes! Thank you for pointing that mistake out; it's fixed now. And also, thank you for everything else. (Kinda sounded like Astrid there, didn I?)*

>*****_**Sephhiroth Crescent-Valentine:**_** More or less****.** I guess it depends on how you think of Valka.

>*****_**TheWritingFactory:**_*****
Thanks, and sorry if I didn't understand the question.

>**_YouNameIt:_**** Yep, it was.** Thank you!

>*****_*****_**kkrreaakk: **_*****_**Hehehe, don't worry. I tend to do the same thing from time to time. Thanks!**_**

>PascalDragon:_** Yeah, Kristoff has issues... ;). That's right, **it was meant to be a synonym to "wintery storm". And don't worry; Part II won't be online until after at least another month (hopefully less than that, though**).***** Thanks, Sven!

>*****_**Cry-Pom:**_** Thank you! And thanks also for supporting my plea for spoiler-free reviews. *****

>*****_Azlea:_ Thanks! Your review made my day too. :D

>*****_lady:_**** Yeah, they definitely needed it. Good thing Valka showed up when she did*****.

>*****_**WolfCharm134:**_** Thanks! I will absolutely continue writing it*****.
>**

****Next chapter will deal with the origin and history of Furies (the way I think it is). Just a little something to keep you waiting. Only two more chapters to finish Part I!
>**

****Don't forget to review on your way out!****

10. The Dragon Rider

The flight from the Ice Palace to the masked man's intended destination was a really short one. They hadn't been in the air for five minutes when he and his dragon began descending towards a frozen lake covered in fog in the middle of the mountains over which the moon was barely starting to shine. Elsa followed him, wondering why they hadn't fled deeper into the mountain range.

When they were only a few meters off the ground, the masked man's dragon let go of Marshmallow who barely managed to keep his balance as his momentum carried him forward a couple more meters. Both dragons landed on the ice carefully as to avoid breaking it. Elsa hopped off Wintergale's back, trying to take in her surroundings. She couldn't see a thing through the fog, so she was startled when she made out a shadow approaching her and Wintergale. She raised her hands, getting ready to defend herself if needed.

"Elsa! Wintergale! You're fine!"

Temporarily dumbstruck by the sound of the familiar voice, she nearly jumped when she felt a pair of stick arms wrapping one of her legs. Then it dawned on her that this was the place where Olaf and Sven had first brought Wintergale—and that the one hugging her leg was

Olaf.

"Yes, we are," Elsa finally replied, kneeling to return the hug. "What happened? Why did Wintergale show up in the Palace?"

"I don't know," the tiny snowman said. "She began growing restless when the storm above the North Mountain became stronger. She was gone before I could stop her."

Elsa sighed. Wintergale must've sensed that she was in danger. She should've that the dragon wouldn't leave her alone, no matter how much she'd managed to convince her to go with Olaf and Sven in the first place. "Don't worry, Olaf. It wasn't your fault. I was just curious."

Marshmallow drew closer to Elsa's side, his ice spikes still protruding from his body. Olaf looked at him and smiled, letting go of Elsa's leg and running to hug Marshmallow's.

"Brother! You're okay, too!" he exclaimed.

"Little brother Olaf is fine?" Marshmallow asked.

"Yeah, Sven and I are good." Then Olaf seemed to come to a realization. He looked at Elsa. "What happened to your Palace?"

Elsa looked back to the North Mountain. The Palace wasn't entirely destroyed, but the damage would no doubt be extensive and Sigurd would probably burn it to the ground if possible once he woke up. "That doesn't matter right now, Olaf. We're all alive, and that's something to be grateful for." She noticed that Marshmallow's spikes were beginning to recede and that his crown was missing.

"Marshmallow, where did your crown go?" she asked him. "Did it fall when we were flying?"

"Bad guys with arrows," he said as he shook his head, a mixture of anger and sadness in his voice. Elsa assumed that one of Sigurd's soldiers had shot the crown off his head.

"Oh, don't worry," she told him, placing a hand on his leg to soothe him. "I'll get it back for you later."

"Hey, you met new friends!" Olaf said, looking past Elsa. She turned around and saw that the warrior and his dragon were approaching the small group. "Hi, I'm Olaf, and I like warm" he began as he walked towards them, but he was cut off by Elsa grabbing his hand before he could advance any further. She shook her head slightly and pulled him behind her.

"Please," she said to the warrior, "don't think of me as ungrateful, because I really appreciate what you did for us back there but why? Why are you helping us? And who _are_ you, anyway?"

The man didn't speak. He just lifted his staff and pointed one end at his dragon then at Elsa. The dragon instantly opened its mouth.

"Wait, w-what are you doing?" Elsa asked. There was no reply, but it

became evident that the dragon was about to unleash hell on her and her companions. "No, wait!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands as if to try and tell it stop it.

But the dragon didn't stop. It expelled a vortex of fire at her. Instinctively, she shot as strong a stream of ice magic as possible to try and counter the attack. She didn't have to do it for long, though. For as soon as it had begun, it stopped.

Temporarily blinded by the flash and unable to see past her own nose because of the steam caused by the clash of ice and fire, all she could hear was two distinctive roars to her left and to her rightâ€"belonging to Marshmallow and Wintergale, respectivelyâ€"and another roar in front of her. Then she felt a gust of wind against her face that quickly cleared the air and revealed its source to be the four-winged dragon who was batting its wings mightily. To its side, the man stood unmoved, no longer commanding it to attack.

Elsa gestured at Marshmallow and Wintergale to stand down and stay behind her. "Why would you do that?!" she shrieked at the man.

"Sorry about that, but I needed to see it from up close," the warrior spokeâ€"with a distinctively feminine voice. Elsa's jaw dropped. Not only had this mysterious guy finally decided to talk to her, but now it also turned out that the guy was actually a _girl_.

"See what?" was all Elsa could ask, still in shock.

"If you truly had control over the elements," the warrior replied stoically. Elsa frowned. "I saw it before when you were flying on the Ice Fury's back but couldn't believe my eyes. I've been observing you for a few days now, in fact. I don't know who you are, but I must say that I'm impressed by your mastery of such an amazing gift."

"Observing me?" Elsa repeated.

"To determine whether you had what it took to look after this Ice Fury," the woman replied, gesturing with her hand at Wintergale.

"Ice Fury?" Elsa parroted. "Is that what you call her?"

"That's how all dragons of her kind are called."

Elsa was getting more confused by the minute. "Her kind? You mean there are other kinds of dragons out there? How can they still be alive? And how come no one has seen a dragon in so many centuries?"

The warrior shook her head in disbelief. "I suppose I shouldn't expect less from someone like you."

Elsa furrowed her brow even more, slightly offended by those words. "Someone like me?"

"Someone from a world that no longer believes in dragonsâ€"a world that has degraded them to mere myths and legends." Elsa opened her mouth to speak, but the warrior held up her right hand, still holding

her staff only with her thumb, and spoke first. "I imagine you have a hundred more questions, so if you would let me teach you some history, I believe they will all be answered—or at least most of them, hopefully."

"What? You won't even tell me your name, but you want to teach me some history?"

"My name is not important. What I have to tell you is."

Elsa was starting to lose patience—and it showed. Snow was starting to fall all over the place. "No, I need to return to Arendelle. Sigurd has my sister and her boyfriend, and if I don't get back before he does—"

"We still have plenty of time before that man and his pitiful army returns to your town. After all, we have something they don't," the woman said, patting her dragon.

Elsa wasn't sure what to think. First, this woman appeared out of nowhere and saved her; then, she tried to cook her; and now, she wanted her to just sit and listen to a story? For better or for worse, though, she was right; the dragons could get them all there faster. Besides, Elsa needed something to calm herself, and even though she didn't want to admit it, she did want to know about the fate and apparent survival of dragons. Perhaps listening to this mysterious person would allow her to focus on something other than Sigurd.

She finally sat down. Olaf and Marshmallow did the same, but Wintergale didn't even rest on her hind legs, though she at least seemed a bit more relaxed than when the four-winged dragon attacked them.

"Hundreds of years ago," the woman began, "dragons used to roam free all over the earth. Humans feared them, but they also respected them, and some even revered and worshipped them. But one day, that fear became so great that it drove humans to hunt and kill dragons. Eventually, all the dragons disappeared from your world—all of them."

"Sorry to interrupt," Elsa said, "but why is it that you keep saying 'your world'? What, are you from another world or something?"

"You could say that, yes," the woman replied. "I'm from the world of dragons—or rather, from the part of this world to which all dragons were forced to flee. Fortunately, humans in this age have chosen to explore and expand their frontiers eastward and westward instead of northward."

"You mean—?"

The woman nodded. "Despite the continuing war between dragons and Vikings, dragons have managed to thrive in the northernmost part of the Earth."

"Vikings?" But that couldn't be. The Viking Age had ended 700 years ago.

The woman chuckled. "You'd be surprised of how much of Viking culture

has survived the passing of time. Many Viking tribes have remained isolated from the rest of the world, living in island and coastal regions far to the North, including the one I once belonged to."

Elsa was baffled. "Soâ€¦ you're a Viking?"

"Not anymore," the woman said solemnly after a short pause, lowering her head. There was a trace of regret and longing in her voice. If only Elsa could see her expression behind that maskâ€¦

"What happened?" Elsa asked her.

The woman sighed. "Some of us were just born different." When Elsa frowned once more at this statement, she continued. "The island where I used to live has always been a land of 'kill or be killed', but I always thought peace was possible. It was a very unpopular opinion. Then, one night, during a raid, a dragon broke into our house, finding my newborn son in the cradle. Despite my beliefs, I would never have traded the life of my child for that of a dragon, so I rushed to protect him. But what I saw when I arrived at the house was proof of everything I believed." She placed a hand on her dragon's neck. "He was looking at my son with curiosity, almost as if it were his own. Then it looked at me, the child's mother, and I saw in his eyes that this wasn't a vicious beast, but an intelligent, gentle creature whose soul reflected my own."

Elsa was absolutely amazed by this Viking woman's account. In a way, she identified herself with her. She had felt and thought the same thing when she found Wintergale.

"My husband was the chief of the village. He loved me, but he never agreed with my opinion. So, when he arrived at the house, he didn't hesitate to fight the dragon in order to protect us. Of course, the dragon was forced to fight back. He went to save our son first, probably hoping that I would be able to fend the dragon off until he could finish him. But I couldn't even lift the sword. How could I take its life? And when the dragon looked at me again, he seemed to read my thoughtsâ€¦ my soul. So, instead of killing me, he snatched me from the house. All I could hear as the dragon flew me away was the hopeless voice of my husband calling my name. I never saw him or my son again, but I know in my heart that they're still alive and well."

"I'm sorry," Elsa said.

"Don't be," the woman replied, recovering her firm and confident voice. "Like I said, I'm no longer a Viking. I'm more of a dragonâ€¦ always have been. They always were my passion, and that passion only grew after I was taken. I'll admit, I was afraid at first, but after a day or so of travel, it became apparent that this dragon didn't want to kill me. Every once in a while during our flight, he would look down at me with peaceful eyes, making sure I was fine. Then we finally reached our destination, even farther away to the North. It was a dragons' nestâ€¦ an enormous, magnificent cave encased in ice. And its creator was no other than a Bewilderbeast, the king of all dragons. We're talking about a gigantic sea dragon that breathes ice and is capable of controlling other dragons. When I was brought before him, I feared for my life once again, but the Bewilderbeast must've seen the same thing that Cloudjumper did, for

it just welcomed me with open arms" so to speak."

Cloudjumper? Elsa wondered. Then she looked at the four-winged, owl-like dragon and assumed that it was the one the woman was talking about. _Nice name._

"It's been 15 years since that day, and I've spent each of them rescuing dragons, saving them from both certain death at the hands of other bloodthirsty Vikings and a life of slavery and suffering under Drago Bludvist's command."

"Who?" Elsa asked.

"I've become wary and distrusting of other humans," the woman continued, ignoring Elsa's question. "No person has ever given me a reason to trust them" until now."

She looked at Elsa who suddenly lost all interest in her previous doubt. What could she have done to earn this warrior woman's trust?

Almost like she could read her mind, the woman said, "There are some things you need to know first."

"Just some?"

The woman looked away, to the horizon. "What I'm about to tell you is something I'm not entirely sure about myself. I've been collecting bits and pieces of information over the last decade, but it wasn't until recently that I found a vital piece of the puzzle, allowing me to decipher and understand it all about your dragon and her kind's history.

"Long ago, a Viking called Bork took the initiative of studying and classifying dragons in order for future generations to know their so-called enemy and how to fight them. He wrote a book, the Book of Dragons, from most of his field notes, but he kept some of them to himself, mostly whenever he believed that they referred to general folklore rather than actual dragons. He passed down all of his lifework, including said notes, to his descendants. I was a friend of the latest of them, and after some time of knowing each other, one night he finally allowed me access to Bork's private archive. That was the same night I was taken. I had the notes regarding mythological dragons in my hand when they attacked, and in my haste to go out and help, I lost the pages" but I still remember every single word written in them.

"Among those notes, I found some mentioning the existence of dragons capable of becoming as black as night itself or as white as the purest snow at will, and of breathing fire or ice. No one had seen them before, and even Bork was never able to get close to them, but he did find their nest"a snowy mountain in the mainland. According to him, even from a distance one could see the sheer amount of dark shadows flying around the mountain, guarding it at night, and during the day, when the black shadows were gone and he tried to get close to their nest, the snow would stare at him with thousands of blue eyes. Bork believed that this was not one single dragon species but two separate, yet related, species. He called them Night Furies and Ice Furies, respectively.

"Around the time I was taken, Night Furies had already been attacking my village for some time, along with some other dragon species, and so Gobberâ€"Bork's descendantâ€"had updated the Book of Dragons to include them in its pages, even when they were still a mystery. Ice Furies, however, had never appeared anywhere. I was intrigued after reading about them, and after Cloudjumper and I bonded, I decided to finish Bork's work and learn about Ice Furies. Bork's notes included the exact location of the Furies' mountain, so I traveled there. But when I arrived, I found nothing. The place was completely devoid of life.

"I wasn't sure if it was some sort of trap or something, so I had to gather every last bit of courage inside of me to venture inside the mountain caves. There were ice blasts covering the walls, similar to those of the Bewilderbeast but much smaller, and the amount of snow almost made the tunnels impassable. It took me a while to find themâ€"hundreds of skeletons belonging to both dragons _and_ humans. It was a terrifying scene. Today I feel like I desecrated a graveyard.

"I also found lots of eggshells, which served to confirm Bork's theory that this was the Furies' nest. I knew for a fact that Night Furies were still alive, so I could only assume that a human army of dragon slayers eradicated most of them and drove the rest awayâ€"which resulted in them being forced to seek refuge far away from their home.

"It would later turn out that I was right."

There was a deep sadness in her words. This woman _mourned_ the loss of so many dragons more than the loss of human life. Had she met her before finding Wintergale, she'd probably have considered her a mad person. But having met Wintergale first, Elsa was starting to feel the same sadness as the story progressed, mostly because she imagined how lonely Wintergale would've been without others like her. Why would anyone do such a thing? Why kill an entire species like that? And yet, she knew firsthand how powerful fear could be and what it could force people to do.

"Years later, I found an ice cave in the middle of the ocean, only a few days West of the mainland. It was the lair of another Bewilderbeast, but it was abandoned, and even on the outside, it showed signs of a battle taking place there long ago. And when we entered itâ€"There was a long pause. Even with that mask on, the woman looked troubled. "There were several shipwrecks, human remains by the hundreds with their weapons scattered everywhereâ€"and the remains of the Bewilderbeast itselfâ€"with a massive harpoon still embedded in its skull. But if that weren't enough, I also found its carbonized eggsâ€"It was heartbreaking.

"Later, on the bow of the largest shipwreck, I found a massive weapon. It had Drago's signature all over it. I had seen them beforeâ€"large tubes capable of spitting fireballs at great speed. This one, though, wasn't designed to shoot fire. I believe he used it to shoot that harpoon on the poor Bewilderbeast's head."

This was the second time that she mentioned the name 'Drago', but by now, Elsa knew better than to ask about it. It was obvious, however, that whoever this Drago character was, he despised dragons and had the means to eradicate them. Of course she recognized the weapon the

woman had described; it was a cannon, one capable of dealing the killing blow to even the biggest dragons such as the one the warrior had mentioned. No wonder she hated him.

"I could stand it no more and thought of leaving that place in that instant, but something compelled me to stay. There was something else about this place. Along with the characteristic ice blasts from a Bewilderbeast, there were smaller blasts everywhere on the ground. Soon I discovered that, along with the human remains, there were Furies' skeletons by the dozens, all with swords and spears and arrows piercing their bones. They probably were the last Ice Furiesâ€ and now they were goneâ€

"I figured that they had taken refuge in this Bewilderbeast's home, only to meet their end at the hands of a merciless madman. That was too much for me to handle, so I hopped on Cloudjumper's back and took flightâ€ but then, when we took off and I was able to see the scene from above, I realized that most of the Furies' skeletons formed a perfect circle and that they were arranged in such a way that they were protecting something. In fact, they were all facing to the center of the circleâ€to a considerably large ice formation. We landed close to itâ€ and that's where I found her."

For the first time in a while, she looked back to her small audience, namely at Wintergale. She dropped her shield and staff and approached the Ice Fury ever so slowly. The white dragon snarled, but the woman was not deterred. With each step she took, Wintergale's defiant attitude faded more and more, until she was finally able to place her hand on the dragon's head. And in that instant, Wintergale lost all of her fierceness and crooned softly. Elsa was speechless, in awe of this womanâ€this dragon rider and tamer.

"Oh, she's beautiful," the woman said. "When I found her encased in ice in that cave, I felt a spark of hope. Even to their dying breath, the last members of this magnificent species had devoted themselves to save at least one of their own from such a bloody fate. They sacrificed themselves to ensure that she wouldn't suffer.

"Despite what I felt each time I saw that overwhelmingly sad battle scenario, I kept visiting that caveâ€visiting _her_â€whenever possible. Each time I was there, I daydreamed of this Ice Fury freeing itself from its iceshell and flying away to find another one of her kind, no matter how absurd it could seem. I imagined all the things, all the secrets that I could learn from them if such a thing happened. But I never actually thought I'd get to see her like thisâ€alive and well.

"Then, a year ago, there was an unnatural change in the weather. No matter how far to the South I went, there was ice and snow everywhere I looked. Even the ocean was frozen solid. For some reason, after several wintery days, I felt compelled to go to the cave, but when I arrived, I was horrified to see that there was a huge gap in the ice where she used to be. There was also a new shipâ€not a shipwreck, but a perfectly functional ship, if only with some minor damage. Its crew probably found the cave and decided to seek refuge from a storm. I found several tracks leading from the ship to the Ice Fury's tomb, and from there they lead away from the cave towards the mainland, across the frozen sea.

"Someone had taken her. I couldn'tâ€I _wouldn't_â€let them do it,

whoever 'they' were, so Cloudjumper and I went looking for them. I followed their tracks all the way to the mainland within hours. They probably had been traveling for days by now to get that far. And suddenly, the inclement weather stopped. It all happened in an instant. The ice and snow were gone, and the sea was thawed. The forests were green once moreâ€”and among the trees, I caught a glimpse of a white blur running away to the North. It was the Ice Fury, no longer frozenâ€”and alive."

Elsa remained silent. She was aware of her involvement in this woman's story and would tell her about it later, but not now. She was still trying to cope with the fact that Wintergale's fate was more closely related to Elsa's than what she'd previously thought. After all, had she not unleashed an eternal winter and then undone it, her dragon would still be trapped in that ice.

"I didn't care about learning who the trappers were anymore. I just began looking for the white dragon. It ran fast, almost as much as a Night Fury in midflight, and it didn't stop to rest until it reached its destination a couple of days laterâ€”the Fury Mountain. Fast though he is, Cloudjumper was unable to keep up the pace with the Ice Fury, and we were finally forced to land and rest, still a day away from the mountain. By the time we were able to reach it, the dragon was gone.

"I couldn't find an explanation as to why the dragon would journey back to that place after everything that had happened there. Moreover, I couldn't understand why it hadn't flown all the way there. I was starting to think that my efforts to rescue and bring the dragon back home with me would ultimately be in vain, but I searched for it in the vicinity of the mountain nonetheless. And as chance would have it, this search wouldn't prove useful, for while I didn't find the Ice Fury, I did find something I hadn't seen the first time I'd been there. To the East and only a day's journey from the mountain, to the side of a cliff, there was a large villageâ€”an abandoned village, destroyed and burned to the ground long ago.

"I had a feeling that it could be important, so I went down to take a closer look. It didn't take me long to realize that this human settlement had been attacked by dragons. There were many scorch marks, but they all belonged to the same kind of dragon. I recognized them from those found in my village after any given dragon raid in the past. They belonged to Night Furies.

"There were very few human remainsâ€”which was understandable, considering who had been behind this attack. But much to my surprise, there were no less than a dozen Furies' skeletons, all with arrows or spears stuck between the bones. The whole village had been leveled, except for the one building carved into the cliff rather than made with wood. It was the village archive. Their entire recorded history was in there, from the moment of its foundation to its very last minutes of existence. The latter must've been written down by those who sought shelter inside the building. Those records confirmed my theory that the village had been attacked solely by Night Furiesâ€”and also shed some light on the reason why it happened."

Elsa noticed that the dragon rider's hands were trembling. Had she found something even more shocking in that archive than what she'd found in the mountain and the ice cave?

"The village chieftain had rallied men from several Viking tribes to eradicate the dragons living in the mountain, despite the fact that none of them had ever raided a single human settlement," the woman continued. There was rage in her words, and Elsa realized that the trembling hands were not because of shock or sadness but because of the anger she felt. "These people lived of farming and hunting, but some of the villages they traded with depended on fishing to survive, and apparently there was a shortage of fish at some point because the Furies used to harvest those waters to feed themselves. Those other villages sought the help of this chieftain who had fought other dragons in the past, and he didn't hesitate to eradicate the Furies. It probably was with the purpose of earning the loyalty of those people so he could later control them.

"Among the region dwellers, it was widely known that the black dragons guarded the mountain at night while the white dragons went fishing and that the opposite thing happened during the day. The chieftain believed that it would be easier to fight the ice-breathing dragons rather than the fire-breathing ones, so they assaulted the mountain one day in broad sunlight when the Night Furies were nowhere around, in the hopes that by eliminating the white dragons, the black ones would leave. Most of the people he rallied paid a steep price by doing so, but their quest was successful. They killed most of the white dragons and destroyed their nest.

"There were only a few dragons that survived the attack by fleeing the mountain, carrying their eggs and even some newborn babies in their paws. The record proudly included accounts of the people who shot most of them out of the sky and how they reveled in seeing the eggs shatter and the babies fatally wounded upon falling.

"The following night, the Night Furies had laid waste to the village.

"Learning all this had me thinking a lot. Why would the Night Furies destroy this place and leave afterwards? If the menace was gone, why didn't they stay? But then a thought occurred to me, a crazy thought which could seem impossibleâ€¦ and yet, it gave sense to everything else."

She paused and looked at Elsa. "Did you get the same feeling I got around this Ice Furyâ€"that it was a female?" Elsa nodded. "Well, that's because she is. All Ice Furies are females," she stated with absolute certainty.

"What?" Elsa asked. "How can you possibly know that?"

"I don't know, but it's the only possible explanation. Night Fury sightings had been decreasing each year in every Viking village by the time I was taken. That shouldn't be happening. Even after leaving their original home, there should've been enough of them to reproduce. Their numbers should've been growing or at least remained the same, which could only mean they'd been dying off, either of old age or killed by other dragons or Vikingsâ€"all because there are no females to mate with anymore."

There can be any number of reasons for that," Elsa tried to argue, but she couldn't even get to her next sentence.

"Yes, but this is the only one that explains everything. Why else

would Ice Furies also be near extinction? And why would they behave like that?"

"Behave how?"

"Of the few ones that tried to escape the massacre, all were carrying eggs and babies in their paws, remember? They could've flown away with greater ease without the additional weight, especially considering that their precious cargo required a more delicate flight, but they wouldn't leave the young ones behind. That's maternal instinct! This Ice Fury here must've been among the last surviving youngsters in the Bewilderbeast's lair. Drago and his soldiers must've killed the rest, and when the older Furies became aware of this, they all gave up their lives to save her. Again, that's what a mother would do!"

The dragon rider seemed overly excited about all this. Elsa wouldn't know about motherhood as she was not a mother, but this woman was, so she should take her word for it. Besides, it did make sense. But—
"But that would mean that the older Furies knew she would survive inside the ice."

"Yes! I read in the Book of Dragons about another kind of dragon—the Skrill—that could also stay safely frozen for decades because of their internal body temperature, but that's not the point. What matters is that Bork and all Vikings after his time had it all wrong for centuries! Night Furies and Ice Furies are not two different kinds of dragons but one single species, with males and females having their own unique characteristics!"

Then, all of a sudden, she sobered up. "That's also why the Night Furies attacked that village. It was a retaliation strike, an act of vengeance for the murder of their mates and offspring. It's also why they didn't stay in the mountain after the threat was gone. They had no reason to stay. Their families were gone."

"Families? So, what, you think the Furies were social animals, like wolves?"

"Absolutely, and perhaps even more so. Think of it. Night Furies fishing during the day and Ice Furies fishing during the night. They took turn to feed themselves and to bring food to the baby Furies. They took care of each other, both males and females using their respective camouflaging abilities to remain concealed while guarding the mountain."

Elsa thought about all this for a moment. Then she considered something. "You said there were Bewilderbeast eggs in that ice cave?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't find any other dragon remains other than those of the Bewilderbeast and the Furies, right?"

"Yes, why?"

"Could it be possible that the Ice Furies' maternal instinct also inspired them to stay in the Bewilderbeast's lair specifically to take care of its eggs as well as of their offspring?"

The dragon rider seemed to mull this over for a few seconds. "Yes," she said slowly and with a pensive tone. "Yes, of course! They all probably chose that specific location as their new home to take care of the Bewilderbeast's eggs along with their own surviving babies. Now that's something that hadn't occurred to me before. Nice thinking, young girl."

Elsa smiled. Listening to this woman and even participating in her theories had helped her clear her mind and calm down. And while Wintergale's was a somewhat tragic story, at least now she wasn't alone. Who knew? Maybe one day a Night Fury would show up somewhere and the dragon rider would be able to bring the two Furies together. She chuckled at the thought of baby Furies. If they were half as cute as Wintergale could be on occasion, then she'd be in for a treat with her baby dragons someday.

"Of course, after finding that record and realizing everything I just told you, I couldn't just let this Ice Fury get herself killed, so I began searching for her again. It took me a couple of months, but I finally began to distinguish a pattern—villages mysteriously thrown into a short-lived winter from North to South of the mainland. Eventually, I found the dragon as it fled from one village to another. Again, it was running. I tried to get close to her whenever I managed to catch up with it, but it ran away each time. It always ran. I can only assume that she decided to behave less like a dragon to avoid being caught and slain as easily as her relatives were—and that included flying. In the end, I—" She paused when Elsa began shaking her head. "What?"

"That's not it," Elsa said. "At least not entirely. When I first tried to convince Wintergale to fly me home, she looked terrified, almost as if she believed she'd die the moment she even tried to take flight. Maybe she was one of the newborn babies that survived. I mean, imagine if you were only a few days old and saw how other dragons fell to the ground while flying away from your home as you are carried in your mother's arms—or paws, or whatever. The thing is, as a child, one perceives the world in a different way. Believe me, I know."

The rider seemed deep in thought. "A dragon with fear of flying, all because of a horrible childhood memory," she murmured. "That's a first. It makes sense, though. Anyway, in the end, I thought it would be better if I just kept my distance and gave her the means to survive without her knowing. Did you know that Stormcutters like Cloudjumper here can breathe fire on seawaters long enough to evaporate enough of the water and make it rain for a short time over a small region?"

Elsa gave the rider a double take. "You have been causing the rain that Wintergale turned to snow and used to sneak into Arendelle?"

"Only after she took longer than usual to leave her hiding place and head towards another village, just in case. She's really smart, as you already know. Not many dragons can come up with such creative ways to alter their environment."

Wintergale walked closer to Elsa who looked briefly at Olaf and Marshmallow before wrapping her arm around her dragon's neck. Olaf

seemed fascinated with this woman's story, while Marshmallow remained serious. She considered the rider's words. "Yes, she is," she agreed with her last statement.

The dragon rider then picked up her shield and staff and moved away from the icy lake they'd been standing on, towards the rather small cave where Sven was sleeping. Elsa and her snowmen followed her. She had Cloudjumper light a small fire on the ground and then sat down with a heavy sigh. "I've talked long enough, and you already know where this story ends. I could use a story myself, so I think now it's your turn to tell me one, missâ€|"

It wasn't until now that Elsa remembered she hadn't had the chance to introduce herself. "Oh, sorry. I'm Queen Elsa of Arendelle." She mentioned her royal title without pride but humbly.

"Queen?" the rider repeated. "So you are royalty."

Elsa blinked. "You knew? But you said you didn't know who I was."

"I didn't, but I guessed as much. Ice Palace, elegant outfitâ€"it wasn't that hard to deduce. Except that I thought you were a princess, not a queen."

Elsa shrugged. "It's been only a year since my coronation."

The rider noddedâ€"and at last, she took her mask off, allowing Elsa to see her face. Judging by the fact that she'd mentioned having a child over fifteen years ago, she'd expected to see someoneâ€| older. This woman, however, looked amazingly young. She had beautiful light green eyes and light olive skin, not to mention that slim figureâ€"not exactly what she'd imagined a Viking woman to be. Her expression was hard to read, though. She showed no emotion in her face, almost making the removal of the mask pointless.

"You intrigue me, Queen Elsa," she said. "Perhaps as much as this Ice Fury. I want to know who you are and what made this dragon trust you so muchâ€"beside your powers over the elements."

"Actually, my magic is limited to ice and snow. I can't control everything else."

"Oh. My mistake. Still, there has to be something else that brought you and this dragon together."

Elsa scoffed. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you that I may have more to do with the circumstances that brought Wintergale back to life."

And during the next two hours, Elsa shared her own life story with the dragon rider, from the moment when she learned as a child that she had ice powers, to the incident with Anna, to her years of isolation, to her parents' demise, to her coronation day and the events that followed, to her learning that love was the key to controlling her abilities, and finally to the present day. The rider listened carefully and silently, only nodding every now and then. Elsa took care to voice her own thoughts regarding the timing of the events that brought those men to the ice cave and allowed for Wintergale's resurrection.

It was well past midnight by the time she'd finished telling her story, including the most recent events such as her encounter with Sigurd and Wintergale. The rider remained silent for a while after that. Olaf and Marshmallow, and even Wintergale and Cloudjumper, had all fallen asleep by now, so it was just the two of them awake. Again, it was easier to read this woman's body language, scarce though it was, than her facial expression.

"Let me get this straight," she finally said. "You built that Ice Palace all by yourself?"

"Yes," Elsa replied, the slightest hint of pride in her voice.

"Wow. It's a beautiful place, I must say. I'm sorry I had to damage it."

"That's okay. If I could build it from scratch, I'm sure I'll be able to fix it."

Elsa nearly fell backwards when the woman smiled at her. "I like your confidence, Queen Elsa. You sure have come a long way from that fearful young lady you used to be. And now I see why you were able to bond so closely with Wintergale. I like that name, by the way."

"Thank you. My sister Anna helped me choose it."

The sole mention of Anna brought Elsa back to reality. Sigurd would probably be already on his way back to Arendelle, and even while it would still take him a day or so to get there, the fact was that her sister had her days numbered unless she returned to save her.

"I mentioned before that I had found no reason to trust any other human in a long time until I met you," the woman said, "and I still mean that. In a way, you, just like me, have the soul of a dragon. No one else would've had mercy for the Ice Fury like you did. Under other circumstances, I would let you keep Wintergale, knowing that her life is in good hands, butâ€¦"

Elsa's heart skipped a beat. "But?"

The rider sighed. "That man, Sigurd, will keep harassing you and your people for as long as he knows that you are protecting his price. Wherever he came from, he obviously has some degree of charisma if he managed to gather such an army from so many towns and villages. Even if you managed to make him leave, he'd probably bring reinforcements with him in the futureâ€¦ and I don't think you'd take the alternative of killing him. So, as long as this Ice Fury is here, both she and your kingdom won't be safe. And no matter how hard you try to keep her from all harm, eventually you will be forced to make a choice between Wintergale's life and the lives of your loyal subjectsâ€¦and your loved ones. I can't allow that."

"What are you saying, exactly?" Elsa asked with concern.

"I'm saying that it might be in Wintergale's best interest to come with me, back to my dragon sanctuary. She will be safe there, and she won't be alone. There may not be any Furies there, but she will have more dragons to get along with at least."

Elsa looked at a peacefully sleeping Wintergale. "Butâ€¦ I saved herâ€¦"

"And you nearly got her killed today. I don't blame you for what happened back at your Ice Palace, and I know you tried to do your best to protect her, but this is not what you're meant to do. You're a Queen, not a warrior. And even if you were, we both know this dragon has seen enough war for a lifetime. She needs to live at peace now."

Elsa shook her head. The mere thought of letting Wintergale go broke her heart. Their destinies were intertwined. How could she get separated from her?

"I know it's not an easy choice to let go of someone you love, so I'll give you some time to think about it," the rider told her calmly as she put her mask back on. "Now get some rest. We only have less than a day to prepare for your return to Arendelle to save your sister."

* * *

><p>Reference Notes:_

1) Just a friendly reminder: this story takes place a year after the events of Frozen, which occurred in parallel with episode 14 of Dragons: Defenders of Berk (also titled "Frozen"). I reckon that by said episode, it's been at least a year since HTTYD, so at this point, it's been two years since Hiccup found Toothlessâ€¦and thus, it's been seventeen years since Valka went missing.

2) Based on multiple reliable sourcesâ€¦fan theories, if you mustâ€¦Frozen takes place in the late 18th century (circa 1780). According to Wikipedia, "The Viking Age was the period from 793 AD to 1066 AD in European history, especially Northern European and Scandinavian history, when Scandinavian Norsemen explored Europe by its seas and rivers for trade, raids and conquest." That means Vikings shouldn't even be around anymore, but for continuity's sake, let's entertain the thought that Vikings managed to get this far while keeping their customs and traditions by staying isolated from the rest of the world.

3) Hiccup's words may support the previous argument: "This is Berk. It's twelve days north of Hopeless, and a few degrees south of Freezing to Death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery." In other words, Berk is waaay up North. Also, the journey between the dragon sanctuary and Berk in HTTYD2 doesn't take too long, which means they are not that far apartâ€¦and the sanctuary seems to be closer to the Arctic Circle than not.

4) If Cloudjumper believed that Valka belonged "in the home of the great Bewilderbeast," then the sanctuary already existed by the time he took her there. She may say that the Bewilderbeast "built our nest", but IMHO, I think she just adopted the nest as her own well after the fact.

5) My theory of a single species of Furies is more complex than just sexual dimorphism. Both males (Night Furies) and females (Ice Furies) were meant to protect the nest and are physically made to do it, only they had different ways to achieve this. Under the cover of

the night, the males could fly all around the mountain and scare off intrudersâ€”and if needed be, get rid of them by shooting plasma at their opponentsâ€”while the females went to the sea to feed themselves. Then, during the day, the males would go eat while some of the females stayed inside the caves and the rest of them would blend into the snowy environment and stand guard. The females' ice blast may not be as powerful as the males' plasma blast, but it's still enough to defeat an opponent.

****6)**** The idea of social Furies came from penguins! As you know, penguins for the most part breed in large colonies, which results in a high level of social interaction between birds. With the exception of the emperor penguin, where the male does it all, all penguins share the incubation duties. These incubation shifts can last days and even weeks as one member of the pair feeds at sea. The same happens with Furies, except that the incubation shifts last only 12 hours each. Of course, Valka wouldn't have been able to compare Furies with penguins because the latter live in the Southern regions of the globe.

****7)**** Pay special attention to the part about the village chieftain that wiped out most of the Ice Furies and drove them away, 'cause it will play a pivotal role later on!

* * *

><p>AN: When I first began writing this chapter, I didn't intend it to be this long. In fact, it was meant to have a cliffhanger with Elsa returning to Arendelle just as Sigurd is about to [SPOILER]. However, after ten days of writing it, I've finally decided that it would've taken me at least another day or two to update, and, come on, who wants that?!</p>

****Also,** as you can see, I did more than just write a chapter this time. I actually took some time to do some research, cross-referencing stuff between franchises and acquiring some historical and scientific data, to make sure to get it all right. You see (and if there are any TFRR fans reading this, you know it's true), I don't like leaving plot holes in my stories, and if I ever do leave one accidentally, I try to fix it somehow. Granted, no story is perfect, and I don't intend mine to be, but I hate simply spitting out information with no solid background to support it. Though I'll have to admit, I'm a bit of a perfectionist most of the time.******

****Anyway,** I hope the wait is more than worth it. Please, tell me what you think of my (Valka's and Elsa's) theories. I enjoy reading your comments and thoughts. Speaking of which...******

****24 reviews!** That's the most reviews I've received for a single chapter. Ever. In any of my stories. I'm overwhelmed! I'll try to reply to as many as possible right now, but please understand that I'm uploading this chapter at nearly 8 am local time, after dedicating myself to transcribing the last few pages from my notebook to the computer since 1 am... and I still have to finish my homework for today... aaand I've got less than an hour to do it. So, if you don't find a reply to your review here in the next 12 hours, don't worry (and please, don't kill me). I'll reply to any missing reviews for Chapter 9 as soon as I get back from school, so keep refreshing

the page until you find your reply.
>

**Now, let's get on with
it:**

*****_*****_**RedApple435:**_*****_*****
***** In that case, I hope this chapter has met your
expectations*****. Thanks!

>*****_*****_**alive-in-us**_*****:**_** Phew,
thank goodness! And thank you! I'm glad you liked that entrance. Did
you like this one?**

>Cry-Pom:_** Thanks, I will! Glad you
liked it.

>*****_**lady:**_** Hahaha, you bet! And don't worry,
Elsa will do something to get rid **of them... but I won't spoil it
for you. ;)

>*****_**Jenson22:**_ *****Thank you!
Unfortunately, we're still a ways ****before we get to that meeting.

>*****_**OpalLynx:**_** Hehe, don't worry
about getting off track; I do it sometimes. I share your thoughts and
feelings about HTTYD2. And thank you fur such a wonderful review! I
loved it!

>*****_**magiclover13:**_** Okay, that has to be one
of the best reviews in history (no offense to the rest; I love them
all, but this one was special).***** It made me laugh so hard and
kept me smiling for two days straight. From the bottom of my heart,
thank you!

>*****_**PascalDragon:**_** Don't you worry about
Anna and Kristo**ff, they'll be just fine.**** Thanks for your
review, Sven!

>*****_**YouNameIt:**_** Thank you! I hope
this chapter answered most of your questions (except for the one
about Hiccup and Elsa; sorry, you'll have to wait a bit longer).
*****The kindred spirit is none other than Wintergale; you know, ice
powers, both of them lonely and living in fear, you name it. (No pun
intended.)

>*****_Rat001:_ *choking from the tight hug*
Thank you! I'm glad you liked it. :)

>*****_Hang Tuah:**** I'm glad you're enjoying it and hope
this chapter was of your liking*****. And yeah, I can say
that there are plans to have Wintergale and Toothless become mates...
eventually. Thank you!

>*****_**SerenityQuill:**_** Yes, he is. But don't worry,
he'll get his due. I'm glad you like this story. And could you please
PM me with an example of what you mentioned about sentence structure,
please? It's just that I'm a bit confused by the example you gave.
Thanks!*****

*****Chapter 11 should be easier to write now that I've gotten this
one out of the way... hopefully. I'll try to update within five days
tops. In the meantime... well, you already know the drill. Have a
nice day!*****

*****P.S.: Any Once Upon A Time fans here? And if so, are you as
excited as I am about the cast for the new season? Please, share your
thoughts!*****

* * *

><p>UPDATE: Here are the replies to the missing reviews:

*****_*****_**UnknownBlackHand:**_*****_***
***** Sorry, it's still gona take a few more chapters before that. Anna might be able to deal with Sigurd's men if she wants to... we'll get to see if she does on the next chapter*****. Thanks!

>*****_*****_**Pabulover123**_*****:**_**
Valka definity has a flair for the dramatic! And Sven is such a cool reindeer! I'm glad you liked it.**

>Guest:_** Thank you! I'm sorry I didn't update sooner, but I still hope you liked this chapter.

>*****_**White Hunter:**_** Now you know where she took them, and don't worry, the sisters will see each other again soon**.

>*****_**Guest:**_ *****Hmmm... interesting suggestion. Might feel inclined to do it if the story allows for it****. Thank you!
>*****_**Just curious:**_** She will, but not anytime soon. You'll know when she does. ;)

>*****_**Guest:**_** Yeah, I actually do. I haven't changed the outfit yet because, as Elsa was just beginning to ride on Wintergale's back, she hadn't really needed it in the long term, but she will definitely get a new outfit. And as for Toothless and Wintergale meeting... let's just say that Wintergale might be a little tough to impress*****.
>*****_**Crystall12 (*****two-in-one reply to both of your reviews)*****:**_** Thank you so much! I'm glad you liked her introduction. And Elsariding on Wintergale's back during the battle, that definitely would be something awesome**!
Revise that, it _will_ be awesome.

>*****_**Vivian Wilder:**_** I'm glad you like it and hope this chapter met your expectations as well*****.
Thank you for your review!

>*****_Angryhenry:_ Neither of them. As I mentioned in another reply this morning, the kindred spirit is Wintergale. I hope you like the story, and thank you for reviewing!*****
>*****

*****P.S. 2: I forgot to ask, is any of you OUAT fans also a Fringe fan? Please let me know if you are, 'cause I want to celebrate with you the fact that ETTA BISHOP WILL BE ELSA! (Sorry, fanboy moment there.)*****

11. Farewell

The door to Elsa's room burst open and hit the wall so hard it bounced back and almost closed again. Both Anna and Kristoff jumped

from the bed, startled. She didn't even have time to react before she felt a hand grabbing her by the arm and pulling her out of the bed. She caught a glimpse of someone else doing the same with Kristoff.

"You'd better be wrong about your sister, Princess, or you will regret it for the rest of your short life!" a voice filled with rage hissed into her ear as she was dragged away from the room.

Though a bit disoriented at first, Anna quickly recovered from the rather sudden awakening and prepared for another round with Sideburns. "I take it you found nothing at my sister's Palace," she said, grinning.

"On the contrary. I found your sister with my ice-breathing monster" and a fire breathing one helping them both!"

"What?" Anna said, momentarily unable to keep her disguise as she tried to process what she'd just heard. Was this some kind of ruse from Sigurd's part to make her talk or something like that?

But she knew it wasn't. She had seen the shadow of another dragon two nights ago just after Olaf and Sven had left for Elsa's Palace, after all. That gave her hope. If that shadow had helped Elsa and Wintergale, that meant they had a new ally against Sigurd"one that was bringing _fire_ into the mix. Things should get interesting.

She recovered her defiant stance and chuckled. "Oh, you must be really mad right about now, aren't you?"

Sigurd let go of her and slapped her in the face so hard she fell to the floor. She heard Kristoff shout her name and rush to her side. He put his arm around her, trying to help her get up"right before hearing a _thud_ and feel him fall on top of her. Blood oozed from a large cut on his forehead.

"Pick him up!" Sigurd ordered. Then he forced Anna on her feet and kept dragging her. "We shall see if you keep that smile on your face by the time I'm done with you two."

Anna wanted to reply and make him angrier, but that slap had weakened her resolve. In fact, that comment about her smile was pointless now, since she was no longer smiling. She tasted blood, and her cheek felt swollen. She was surprised he hadn't broken her jaw, but one thing was for sure: he wouldn't break her loyalty to her sister, no matter what he tried to do.

They reached the courtyard, which was packed with Sigurd's men once more. The soldiers carrying Kristoff put a gag on his mouth and tied his hands and feet up. Then Sigurd hit Anna's knees from behind, bending them and forcing her to kneel.

"Behold, Princes Anna of Arendelle!" he announced mockingly. "Let her be an example to those who would challenge us and our righteous quest to rid the world of the ice monster!"

The soldiers cheered and hollered and chanted Sigurd's name while he spoke into Anna's ear again. "I considered humiliating you in front of my men and your boyfriend before killing you, but I've already had enough of you and your sister. At this point, I'll take greater

pleasure in torturing you."

Anna made an effort to look into Sideburns' eyes. "Go ahead. It's your funeral. Elsa will come to rescue us, and then she'll make you beg for mercy."

"Oh, I'm counting on her coming here, and I'm sure she will try to rescue you. The question is, how many fingers and unbroken bones will you have left by the time she arrives?"

He beckoned a soldier holding a pair of large shears in his hands. Another two of them held Anna still while Sigurd took the shears and grabbed her right hand. "So shall be made to those who would side with the beast!"

The soldiers went into uproar. They were craving for Anna's blood. Kristoff tried to shout and free himself, but it was pointless. His bindings looked tight enough. Anna felt the cold, sharp edges of the blades grazing her right thumb. She closed her eyes.

"Please, Elsa," she pleaded silently, her façade of bravado finally undone.

A loud, piercing roar let her know that her plea had been heard and was about to be answered. She looked up—"everyone did, in fact"—to see a pair of winged figures flying low overhead, slowly climbing up higher and higher. The roars was different from Wintergale's, so those had to be both Wintergale and the other dragon Sigurd had mentioned—the one she'd seen before as well. But they weren't flying towards the castle but away from it, to the sea.

They were leaving Arendelle.

Anna's sudden spark of hope nearly faded away. Part of her thought that Elsa was abandoning her to her fate. But as everyone else kept looking to the sky, she suddenly noticed that the stone floor on the courtyard was becoming covered in ice. It reminded her of the day after the Great Thaw, when Elsa turned the courtyard into an ice rink, except that this ice looked less pristine.

Sigurd looked back at Anna with hate, only to finally notice the ice. His lips quivered slightly.

Without warning, dozens of ice spheres emerged from the frozen ground and formed around the soldiers, trapping all of them in several groups. A thick, icy mist appeared out of nowhere and filled the air everywhere, preventing her—and probably Sigurd too—from seeing anything past their own noses. The sound of thumping made by the soldiers trying to break out of their impromptu prisons was momentarily eclipsed by the creaking of the gates being opened. Sigurd dropped the shears, forced Anna on her feet again, and pulled his knife from its sheath, bringing it to her throat.

"Drop it," Anna heard an all too familiar voice say firmly. She felt brave and confident enough to smile once more.

"You are so done for," she told Sigurd.

He didn't reply. He just pressed the blade against her skin. Then a screech—"Wintergale's"—was heard in the distance.

"That's the sound of your ice monster getting away from Arendelle forever, to a place where you will never find it again," Elsa said. "It's over, Sigurd. Let my sister go and I will let you and your men leave my kingdom with your lives."

As Elsa spoke, her voice seemed to come from everywhere. Sigurd kept looking around him, and the only reason why he didn't seem scared witless was probably because he still had Anna hostage.

"I'm being extremely merciful with you, Captain. I could've frozen your heart by now, you know. In fact, if you don't relent, I will freeze your heart and those of your soldiers"and it's not a pleasant experience. Just ask my sister; I've already done it to her once."

Anna immediately caught her sister's drift. "It's true. It hurts only for a moment when it happens, and you don't feel the effects right away, but after a few hours you start getting colder and colder to the point where you can no longer warm yourself up with anything. The pain becomes unbearable with each passing minute until you think it can't get any worse, and yet it does. Your extremities literally freeze, and you can feel how every bone in your body slowly turns into ice, and you believe they will shatter if you make the slightest move, but they don't. And finally, in an instant, everything goes black."

Sigurd seemed somewhat afraid now. He scoffed. "You wouldn't do that. You could've done it back at your Palace, but you chose to trap me in ice. You don't have it in you."

Elsa's voice became filled with mock sorrow complete with sobs. "I returned from my Ice Palace after a few days of rest, only to find that the ice monster was attacking the brave soldiers staying in my castle. I rushed to help them, but it was too late. The monster had already frozen everyone. I had to use my own ice powers to fight it and scare it away, but the damage was already done. I couldn't save them. I couldn't save any of them."

Now even Anna was getting scared. She had fully expected Elsa to arrive on Wintergale's back and deliver some punches or maybe just scare these people away. Obviously she hadn't arrived on Wintergale's back. Okay, that was passable. But this"this was more than just a bluff. Even her voice sounded creepy"full of evil. Elsa really was prepared to do something unspeakable.

This wasn't her sister anymore.

"Your people will never believe such a preposterous story. They'll know it was you," Sigurd argued.

"Oh, will they? How much do they really know? They've been locking themselves up inside their homes every night for almost two weeks, unable to see anything that's happening outside. My servants and guards are imprisoned in the dungeons. You put them there, remember? So, who will be able to say otherwise?"

Sigurd's hand shook almost imperceptibly. Almost.

"This is your last chance. Drop. The. Knife."

Anna's heart beat rapidly. This was getting out of hand. Sigurd was cornered, and cornered mad men like him tended to do reckless things, perhaps believing that it would be better not to go down without a fight. She thought Sigurd would just slit her throat in the end out of desperation. But the funny thing was, she wasn't as afraid of dying as she was of watching her sister become the monster she'd tried so hard not to be.

Sigurd's hand became steady at last, and he chuckled, apparently having lost his fear—or his mind. Anna closed her eyes, half-expecting to feel the sharp steel cut through her flesh and sever her throat.

Instead, he let go of her, pushing her aside.

For a couple of seconds, Anna was hesitant to reopen her eyes. Had Sigurd actually decided to comply with Elsa's demands, or was he about to drive the blade elsewhere into her body? Curiosity finally took over, and when she opened her eyes, she saw Sigurd sheathing the knife. It wasn't exactly dropping it, but it was good enough.

"Wise decision," Elsa said.

The mist vanished, and the ice spheres trapping the soldiers receded. All of them instantly raised their weapons—only to lower them in fear when they heard a loud roar behind them at the gates. It was Marshmallow!

And Elsa was nowhere to be seen.

"Your Majesty?" Sigurd said with a singsong tone. "I thought we had an arrangement."

"Do we now?" Elsa said behind him. He spun around, taking his hand to the hilt of his sword. "Prove it. Tell you men to stand down."

Sigurd chuckled again and moved his hand away from his weapon. "Stand down, people!" he ordered, turning to look at them. "We're leaving this place."

The soldiers seemed confused, but they obeyed. Marshmallow kept blocking the exit while the men prepared to move out. Meanwhile, Sigurd moved closer to Elsa, speaking in a low conversational tone, but Anna was able to hear them anyway.

"Now this is the Snow Queen I'd heard so many stories about. I'm impressed, Your Highness. You could take over the world if you resolved to do it, you know?"

Elsa held her icy gaze.

"I will tell you this, Queen Elsa," he continued. It was the first time Anna didn't hear him talk without a trace of sarcasm. "You've just earned my respect and admiration. As I said before, not every regent has the character and strength of will that you have. That's the only reason why I'm relenting. But know this: no man or woman has ever truly defeated me, and you shall not be the exception. We will meet again someday, and we shall settle this little feud between you

and me once and for all."

Elsa leaned closer to his face. "You better pray that doesn't happen, for your own sake. And if it does happen, you will rue the day you set foot in my kingdom and tried to kill my sister."

Sigurd looked at her with a smug smile on his face. "I'll see you around."

"Never again," Elsa told him firmly. "Go."

Sigurd didn't move, still looking at Elsa haughtily.

"Go!" she commanded.

Several seconds passed before Sigurd finally walked away and towards the gate to lead his men on their journey back home, wherever 'home' was for each of them. Elsa nodded at Marshmallow, and the bulky snowman stepped aside to allow the Captain and his army to march through the gates. The men headed for the Northern Road and disappeared into the night, never to return to Arendelle.

When the army was out of sight, Elsa let her shoulders drop and rushed to help her sister. "Anna, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Elsa," she replied, though half of her face felt on fire.

Elsa knelt to look clearly at her and, probably seeing her swollen cheek, clenched her fists. She stared at the road with a murderous look on her face and began standing up.

"Elsa, please, don't," Anna said, grabbing her sister's arm. "Just let him go. He's not worth it."

Elsa hesitated, but upon looking at Anna's watery eyes, she relented. She stroked Anna's hair and said teasingly, "Are you trying to follow in our cousin's footsteps?"

Anna laughed. "Yeah, something like that."

And both sisters hugged each other lovingly. Anna felt relief wash over her. Her sister was back, in every sense of the word.

"I love you, Anna."

"I love you too, Elsa."

Then they heard a muffled voice saying something like, 'I'm still here'. Anna gasped. "Kristoff!" She ran to him and freed him of his bindings and gag. "I'm sorry. Are you okay?" she asked him, wiping some blood from his forehead.

"I've got a thick skull, remember?" he replied, winking. He grunted as he tried to stand up, but Anna wouldn't let him, as she couldn't help kissing him passionately before he could. She heard Elsa giggle and clear her throat while she approached.

"Thank you for looking after her, Kristoff," she told him, offering a hand to help him on his feet. "I'm sure you did all you could to keep

her safe. You'll make a great brother-in-law someday."

Both Anna and Kristoff blushed as he nodded, smiling. Then, looking all around him, he asked, "Where are Olaf and Sven?"

Elsa opened her mouth to speak, but a cheerful voice and the sound of hoofs hitting the ground cut her off. "Hey, guys!"

Sven arrived running at the courtyard. Olaf hopped off his back and ran to embrace the sisters while Kristoff patted his friend and congratulated him. Nobody noticed Marshmallow approaching until they were all surrounded and lifted in the air by a pair of large snow arms. It was a big, happy family reunion. But there was still someone else missing.

"So, when is Wintergale joining us?" Anna asked when Marshmallow put them down.

Elsa looked sadly up to the sky. "She isn't."

Anna gave her a double take. "What?"

Elsa didn't reply.

"Come on, Elsa. Sigurd's gone. I know that it was all a bluff, so you can drop the act," Anna said, teasingly.

"I wish it were an act," Elsa said. Her voice was shaky.

Anna shook her head. "No, you can't be serious. She is leaving for real? But where is she going?"

A tear rolled down Elsa's cheek. "Where she belongs."

* * *

><p>Elsa woke up at dusk, feeling physically rested but with a heavy heart nonetheless. She had fallen asleep shortly before dawn, pondering about the dragon rider's proposal. She didn't want to concede that the rider was right, even though she knew she was, because that would mean having to get separated from Wintergaleâ€"which was something she didn't want to do. She_ had been the one to find her in that cave. _She_ had been the one to bond with her. _She_ had been the one to help her find her courage and let go of her fear to fly. Besides, she wasn't sure that the Ice Fury would leave her side anyway. After all, she had come back for her to the Ice Palace when she sensed that she was in trouble._

And that had almost got them both killed.

_She knew that none of what they had endured together meant a thing if she couldn't protect her. So, yeah, perhaps she could manage to take Sigurd out of the picture this time, but then what? She wouldn't be able to keep Wintergale in secret forever, especially now that she could fly. What if other people came and tried to kill her? She had to admit that, in a way, she and the rider were on the same page. She wouldn't let anyone kill Wintergale either. But how could she hope to protect her _and_ her kingdom if one endangered the other?_

_At some point, someone crazy enoughâ€"and with enough

resourcesâ€”might declare war to her small kingdom only to get their hands on the Ice Fury. Someone like Drago Bludvist, the man the dragon rider mentioned before, for example. And if such a thing happened, there would be bloodshed. Arendelle simply wasn't prepared for war, not after seven decades of peace. Diplomacy and good trade relationships had been key to maintaining said peace, so a large army hadn't been necessary for a long time. The Royal Guards were Arendelle's sole standing army, and it was made up of roughly 300 menâ€”not enough to actually go into battle with a larger kingdom._

And she was only considering the larger picture on a long term. Right here and now, there was just too much at stake if she kept Wintergale. But could Elsa bring herself to part ways with her dragon?

After she woke up, the riderâ€”who was already awakeâ€”told her to get ready to return and that she had a plan to save Anna. She didn't share it with Elsa, though, and Elsa felt it would be pointless to ask about it. Shortly after that, they left the lake and headed back to Arendelle. Olaf rode with Elsa on Wintergale's back while Cloudjumper carried Marshmallowâ€”who, in turn, carried Sven in his armsâ€”like he did before. They flew over the North Mountain on their way back, finding that, in spite of the damage done to the Palace, it was still standing. There was no sign of Sigurd or his soldiers anywhere, so they kept flying.

When they were a short distance from the fjord, they landed at the outskirts of the town, on top of a hill overlooking it. Elsa felt somewhat relieved to see Sigurd and his army on the road, still a good distance away from the castle. At their current speed, they would arrive in about ten minutes.

She and Olaf got off Wintergale's back. So far, the woman hadn't mentioned anything else about the Ice Fury, perhaps giving Elsa a bit more time to think about it. But now, the rider was gazing at her from behind that mask, and Elsa knew that she awaited a response. She lowered her head. This was one of those times when making a choice is really hard no matter how much time one takes to make it, even when you know which is the right thing to do, because it's extremely painful.

Without saying a word, Elsa knelt to loosen the saddle straps. She took the saddle off Wintergale's neck carefully and placed it on the ground. She did the same with the saddle pad. Wintergale looked at Elsa, puzzled. Elsa cupped the dragon's face between her hands.

"Hey, girl. Remember when I told you to go with Olaf and Sven while I took care of the man chasing you?"

The dragon growled.

"Well, now I need you toâ€”|" she began, but she was unable to finish her sentence. A lump formed on her throat. "I need you to go withâ€”|"

_She couldn't continue. She rested her head on Wintergale's own and began sobbing. There was no easy way to tell someone you loved to go awayâ€”| especially your best friend. Because Anna was her sister;

they were family. But Wintergaleâ€¦|_

"You are my best friend," she told her amid the sobs. "My first friend, in fact. I don't want this, but it's for your own good."

The dragon crooned softly. She sounded sad.

"I know, Wintergale. I love you too. And because I love you, I have to let you go."

Elsa turned to look at the rider. "You promise me she will be safe?"

"She will," the woman said.

Elsa nodded and looked again into Wintergale's eyes. "See? You'll be fine," she said, mirroring her father's last words to her.

Wintergale growled and shook her head, looking at Elsa with begging eyes.

"Please, listen to me. Nothing will ever break our friendship. It doesn't matter if you're here or a thousand miles away from me. Nothing will ever truly break us apart. You hear me, Wintergale?"

The Ice Fury's gaze met Elsa's. She could've sworn the dragon was crying with her.

"I'll never forget you, my dearest friend, so please don't forget me. And always remember what I told you. You are brave and strong, like ice. Don't be afraid to fly. Don't be afraid to be free. And whatever you do, don't ever go back to what you used to be. The past is in the past, okay?"

The dragon nodded. Elsa embraced her once more. "I'll miss you."

They were like that for a while until the dragon rider poked her shoulder. "It's time."

Elsa let go of Wintergale and looked at the woman, waiting to hear her plan.

"The army has arrived at your castle. You must hurry if you want to get there and teach them who the real ruler is in this kingdom. I'll wait for you to arrive at the bridge, and then we'll leave, making a lot of noise to draw their attention." She turned to climb on Cloudjumper's back, but before doing so, she looked back once more. "Good luck, Queen Elsa."

"You too," Elsa replied. "And thank you."

The rider nodded. Elsa and Olaf climbed onto Sven's back, and they left. Marshmallow followed them, running. As they distanced themselves from the woman and the dragons, she looked back to see Wintergale one last time.

Goodbye, dear friend_, she thought._

When they reached the plaza a few minutes later, Elsa hopped off the reindeer's back and instructed him to stay hidden until the soldiers were goneâ€"for good this time. She and Marshmallow ran from one end of the bridge to the other, and then she heard Cloudjumper roar mightily. That was her cue. She took a moment to analyze her feelings, trying to determine which of them was best to use to face Sigurd.

There was a deep sadness from Wintergale's departure. There was rage from the fact that Sigurd had caused them to separate in one way or another. And there was concern for what he could still be trying to do to her sister. She thought of using her anger, just like she had done at her Palace, since it seemed to be the feeling that gave her greater power.

But there was something else she couldn't ignore or shut out: love. She tried to forget about it in order to unleash the fearsome side of her powersâ€| but she couldn't. After all, letting Wintergale go had been an act of love. Saving her sister was an act of love.

Everything she'd been doing so far for both her sister and her best friend had been out of pure love.

Tears streamed down her face once more. They were tears of sorrow but also of gladnessâ€"a gladness that came from knowing that Wintergale would finally find peace and rest in the dragon rider's sanctuary. Now she had to make sure that this sacrifice she'd been forced to make would not be in vain.

She felt a sudden surge of power within her. It was like nothing she'd ever felt before. And in a sudden moment of enlightenment, she realized that she had found a new side to her abilities and how they related to her emotions. Up to now, there had only been one feeling at a time whenever she used her powers. In that very instant, however, there were more than oneâ€"and they were all equally present. There wasn't a prevalent feeling but a balance between them all.

_She felt like she could take these 200 men down in one fell swoopâ€| but she also felt in absolute control. She didn't have to unleash a storm upon these people. And she _wouldn't_ kill them, unless they gave her reason to. Thus, it would be better to deny them the chance to do so._

She stomped the groundâ€|

* * *

><p>"Elsa, think fast!" Anna's loud warning interrupted Elsa's train of thought. Or rather, it was the snowball that hit her squarely on the right side of her face.<p>

Several gasps were heard as everyone else in the courtyard froze in place, awaiting anxiously the Snow Queen's response to this sudden attack.

Elsa wiped the snow from her face. The cold didn't bother her, but

the hit hurt a bit. "Anna, why would you throw me a snowball?"

"Because you need to have some fun," Anna replied, grinning mischievously.

"I'm still Queen of Arendelle, Anna, and you must show me respect!" Elsa stated, sounding upset and even furious.

Anna looked unnaturally nervous. "I-I'm sorry, Elsa. I just thoughtâ€"

"Throwing snowballs at royalty is considered daring and offensive," Elsa interrupted her.

"I-I just got caught up in the heat of the moment andâ€"

"Besides," Elsa continued, her fingers moving and twirling ever so slightly, "you should already know that hitting the Snow Queen with a snowball has its consequences."

Anna failed to notice the large shadow blocking the sunlight right above her. With another twirl of Elsa's fingers, a seven-foot wide snowball she'd been forming in the last few seconds fell on top of Anna's head, covering her completely in snow.

"Now _that's_ funny, and also a good punishment for your audacity," Elsa said as Anna's head popped from under the pile of snow.

Some people laughed as discreetly as possible, but othersâ€"including Kristoffâ€"must've thought that this was the most hilarious thing they'd seen because they began guffawing uncontrollably. This laughter became contagious soon enough as everyone resumed their recreational activities on snow. Elsa could only smile at the sight of her loyal subjects, and even her servants and guards, having such a good time. They deserved it after nearly two weeks of confinement and boredom.

She also took pride in such a well done job. All of her planning and preparation for this anniversary celebration, even if it was taking two weeks later than originally intended, had borne fruit. The courtyard looked amazingâ€"all covered in a thick layer of snow, enough to let all these people have more than enough fun building snowmen and making snow angels. The whole place was littered with them by now, in fact. Needless to say, this was the only place in Arendelle with snow, since the summer sun had finally melted away the rest.

She looked at Marshmallow who stood at the far side of the courtyard, standing guard at the gates as he always did at the Ice Palace. Elsa had given him his own personal flurry just like she had done with Olaf so that he could stay for this event. And though his crown was still missing, he looked happy. The people of Arendelle had warmed up to the giant snowman just as quickly as they had with Olafâ€"especially the children. Some kids would walk up to him at times and ask him to lift them on his shoulders, and he would comply without questioning. Even now, the two kids she'd met during her first night escapadeâ€"Kat and her friendâ€"were enjoying themselves with him.

"Alright, listen, everyone!" she exclaimed. "Take sides, because it's time for the snowball fight!"

She used her powers to make two trenches and hundreds of snowballs, enough for all the townspeople to have a decent fight. Within seconds, the snowballs began flying from one side of the courtyard to the other. Elsa smiled melancholically.

"Well, it's good to know that you have a sense of humor, twisted though it may be," Anna said, still shaking off some snow from behind her ears.

"I'm sorry about that," Elsa said, giggling.

"No, you're not," Anna replied.

"No, I'm not," Elsa admitted, smirking. She still couldn't get used to seeing Anna with her hair short.

"I knew it. But that's fine, I don't mind. I rather have you pull a prank on me than seeing you depressed."

Elsa's smile vanished.

"Come on, Elsa, cheer up. Wintergale wouldn't want you to be like this."

She sighed. "I just keep thinking of how much she would've loved to be here."

"Among so many people?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. She didn't strike me as the sociable type."

Elsa remembered what the dragon rider had told her about Furies. "You'd be surprised."

Anna put a comforting hand on Elsa's shoulder. "You did the right thing, Elsa."

"I know," Elsa replied. "I don't regret letting her go, and I never will. But I feel like part of my heart has been ripped, and I'm not sure if that will ever heal."

Anna stayed silent for a few moments. Then, she smiled. "Do you wanna build a snowman?"

In spite of herself, Elsa smiled at her sister's childish antics. "A living one?"

Anna laughed. "No, a normal one will do."

She took Elsa's hand and took her to the nearest mound of snow. They began building their snowman, and as they did, the rest of the world around them faded away. It was just the two of them in that simple moment. This was the first time in fifteen years that Anna and Elsa built a snowman, and Elsa was enjoying it with every fiber of her being. She felt like that carefree little girl she used to be. It was

a nice feeling.

When they were finished, and while Anna went looking for a carrot among the crates that Elsa had given to Sven, Elsa sat on the ground and reminisced of the night when she and Wintergale first met. A tear fell to the ground and mixed with the snowflakes covering it. Wherever she was now, she could only hope that she was happy. As for Elsaâ€¦|

I'll never forget you, my dearest friendâ€¦|

* * *

><p>AN: And that was the end of Part I. I hope you enjoyed it.**

Obviously, this also means that the (possibly) month-long hiatus has officially begun. I may feel tempted to reduce it to a two-week long one if I get enough lovely reviews, but it won't be less than that because I need those two weeks (plus the remaining days of this one) to finish at least two more chapters for 'The Fifth Race's Reclaimers'. Also, I promised my Latin American readers to translate Chapters 10 and 11 during that time, so there's that. On the other hand, this hiatus will also give people a chance to catch up with HTTYD2, especially in those countries where the film was released later than in the US.

**Before I get to the general replies to the latest reviews, I'd like to answer one in particular from Bloodmoon234:

>I appreciate your comment and your attempt not to insult my writing skills, as you put it. In fact, what you said had me thinking for a while, wondering if could've made a terrible mistake while writing this story. Truth be told, I thought of 200 soldiers (I did say as well that they were soldiers from different places, not mercenaries) because I honestly didn't think that any more than that would fit inside the courtyard with tents and camping equipment and whatnot. However, there was this phrase you wrote that stood out among the rest of your arguments: you said, 'especially in medieval period'. I'm sorry to contradict you, but both Frozen and _Tangled_ (I bring the latter up only 'cause you did) take place between the late 1700s and early 1800s.

>Also, your comment about the army of Corona had me thinking, so I took some time this week to watch Tangled again. I don't like to speculate, but I'd say the number of soldiers in the gallows might be between 200-300, and since Flynn (*cough* _Eugene!_ *cough*) was to be hanged that day, I'd even bet that all of the soldiers in Corona were there both to witness the execution and to ensure that he didn't escapeâ€"which he did, anyway, thanks to the timely intervention of Maximus _and_ a band of mercenaries and criminals.

>But let's say you're right about Corona having no less than a thousand soldiers. The King and Queen of Corona had a reason to have such an army, and I personally think it had nothing to do with a display of dominance. They spent 18 years searching for their daughter who had been kidnapped from the castle under their very noses. That would make any parent paranoid, don't you think? Besides, Arendelle strikes me more as a peaceful kingdom, which would be logic since this was a period of relative peace in Norway where Arendelle is located.
And finally, the reason why Elsa's 'generals'â€"or rather, Royal Guardsâ€"were not present when Sigurd was in the Throne

Room with her could simply be because she asked them to leave the two of them have a conversation in private.**

**Sorry if I sound a bit arrogant with all these arguments. I usually admit when I'm wrong, but if there is a chance I might not be, I think have the right to defend my stance, don't I?

>

Okay, let's get now to the other replies:

**_Angryhenry:_ Nope. At least not yet.

>magiclover13:_** I just love your reviews!***** Always so filled with enthusiasm and with such a detailed analysis of the chapter. Thank you! I'm absolutely looking forward to Baby Furies (in fact, that's one of the many reasons why I began writing this story). I won't say much about how HTTYD2 will fit into this story, and you may or not be right about your theory of the chieftain. And why do we have to wait two months for Season 4?! D: Anyway, thank you so much for reviewing!

>****_alienfinderx:_ Absolutely, we need more Furies, please! Regarding pairings, I guess only time will tell. Your idea sound pretty dramatic indeed, and under other circumstances I might use it. Unfortunately, I already have the whole story 'mapped out', so I'm afraid I can't, but thanks for sharing it, anyway. And no, as much as it made me cry like crazy, I wouldn't take that scene away from the story, 'cause I agree with you. Thank you!

>ArmyWife22079: Yep, just like Vikings were Norsemen, and Arendelle takes place in Norway, they share the same language because of it. Thank you! I'm glad you liked this chapter, and I too am excited about OUAT!

>White Hunter:_** Thanks. I hope this wasn't too sad.**

>****_Linzerj:_ I'm glad you stumbled upon this too ;). Thank you for reviewing! (And is there away to make time run faster?! Two months is just too much!).

>Y ouNameIt:_** I agree with you, the bond between dragon and rider is forever. But Wintergale is also extremely smart, and she knew there was no other way, no matter how painful it was for her as well as for Elsa. I hope you liked this chapter!*****

>*****_imvictorious:_ Thank you! Rest assured, I will continue!

>Pabulover123_*****:**_** Ain't that the truth. But it's satisfying to know that the effort is well worth it. **And what exactly did you think I'd have Sigurd do to Anna? Anyway, I agree with you, if they don't mention Olaf at all, heads are gonna roll! And trust me, you'll love Georgina Haig as Elsa. I'm certain of it! Thanks!

>*****_**Cry-Pom:**_** Thank you! I'm glad you liked the theory.

>*****_*****_**alive-in-us**_*****:**_** Don't worry, I know the feeling... :'(**
>****_Azlea:_ I freaked out as well, and I actually believe that was the general reaction. Thank you for your comments! I hope you liked this chapter.

>lady:_** She could've done it, yeah, but I don't think she would've gone to such lengths. We'll get to see more of Valka and Elsa at some point, and keep those fingers crossed!**
>*****_**Crystal12:**_** Their bond is definitely unique and special. I'm sorry I had to break them apart, but it's only for a while. Thank you!**

>*****_**PascalDragon:**_** U**ps, I guess I _did_ forget to mention her reaction to them!**** Sorry! I'm aware that most people believe _Frozen_ takes place in the 1840s, but some have moved it to the late 1700s because of Rapunzel's appearance in the film. Personally, I chose to follow the latter because having Vikings in the 1800s was already pushing my story too far, and also because of a certain sequel that I'm planning to write which needs it to be in that time period. Which seasons of OUAT have you watched so far? And thanks for mentioning your preference for Sci-Fi stuff; you might be interested in reading my Halo/SGA crossover, then. Thanks for your review, Sven!
>*****_eagle219406:_ You're right, Sigurd is an OC, and yes, it's possible that he's obsessed with Wintergale because of that. I'm glad you like the story and the song adaptation!
>Art n' Music: That's a reaction I'm sooo willing to see, too! Thank you for reviewing!
>

**Now, since I will be 'gone' for a while, I've decided to include my replies to Chapter 11 reviews in this very same author's note rather than waiting until Chapter 12 to answer to them all. It's not much, and I bet some of you would prefer a new chapter instead of replies, but it's something at least. So, if you write a _review_ for Chapter 11, I'll reply to it within 24 hours, so keep refreshing this page in your browser during that time until you find your reply.
)**

Also, I've noticed that there are some new reviews for previous chapters. I'll also reply to those soon enough. I didn't do it before because I was still deciding whether to add those replies to their respective chapter or to answer them in a latter one. I've finally chosen to do the latter, so, same deas as with reviews for Chapter 11. Thank you all for reading!

I'll see you guys in two weeks!

* * *

><p>EDIT: I've moved the replies to all ****reviews for ****Chapter 11 to Chapter 12. Replies to previous reviews will still appear here... as soon as I can give myself some time to find them all. Sorry about that last part. :/
>

* * *

><p>UPDATE
>Replies to new reviews for previous chapters:
**

****Coming soon...****

12. Three Years Later

A/N: Sound the alarms, people! That's right, the hiatus is officially over! Welcome to Part II of 'Ice Fury'.

In case you didn't pay attention to the chapter's title, we're picking up the story three years after the events of Part I.

Enjoy!

* * *

><p>It was pointless. Wherever Elsa turned to look, all she could see was nothing. Darkness enveloped her.<p>

She had been blinded.

Her despicable enemy had made sure of that.

His two minions were surrounding her; that much she knew. She could hear their footsteps around her. They were toying with their prey. She held the sword tightly. It was all she had left; her shield had fallen to the ground after the latest strike from one of them had made it fall to the ground, and she couldn't afford to search for it.

Her remaining functional senses were working at full capacity. She felt a slight air current near her and knewâ€|

She successfully blocked the incoming lunge with her sword and drove the man back. Then she charged forward, but her attack was met by the other soldier's sword. He hit her squarely on the cheekbone with his arm and forced her weapon out of her hand.

Elsa fell to the floor.

"Finish her," she heard the soldier's leader order to his henchmen.

She could tell that the two goons were approaching her.

Good.

This was precisely what she'd wanted. She had fought valiantly but lost nonetheless. Now she was defenseless and injured to their eyes. She wouldn't be able to shoot her ice magic accurately.

They had grown confident.

And now she had the element of surprise on her side.

She touched the ground, and from her hand emerged dozens of ice

streams no bigger than a hair's width that shot in every direction and covered the whole ground. Then she rolled to the left to dodge the attacks of both soldiers, stood as quickly as she could, and conjured an ice sword and a shield of the same material.

Now she could 'see' her enemy—more or less. They say that women have six senses. In her case, it was true. She had learned how to use her ability to sense ice with her mind for other purposes. Now, with each step she gave—and each step _they_ gave—she felt the vibrations of their movements through the ice streams she'd released earlier. The only thing she couldn't clearly see was the look of utter shock that had to be etched on their faces, but she imagined them anyway.

She hit one of the men on the back of his head with her shield, and the guy fell unconscious.

She smirked.

Not giving the other soldier enough time to fully react, she charged once more, trying to drive the ice blade into his shoulder. He probably managed to block the attack only by mere instinct, but it wasn't enough to prevent him from losing his balance and falling on his behind. Even on the ground, he tried to keep fighting, but Elsa quickly gained the upper hand and disarmed him with a swift move of her sword. She pointed its tip at his throat and turned to 'look' in the direction of the leader.

"Impressive," he said, clapping slowly. "Very impressive indeed, Your Majesty. Though some people might call this playing dirty."

"And I call it making use of _all_ my abilities and senses, as you've taught me," she replied, removing the blindfold from her eyes and undoing her weapons. "Thank you, Colonel."

"It is my honor to teach you, Your Highness," the middle-aged man replied, bowing.

Elsa thawed the ice streams and helped the two Royal Guards to stand up, nodding her thanks to them as well for participating in this little training exercise. "Sorry about that hit from behind," she told the one she'd smacked with her shield.

"No, please forgive _me_ for striking your face, Your Highness," he replied, bowing.

"There's no need. We have an arrangement, don't we—to treat me like one of your own so I can have the best training possible?"

"Of course, Your Majesty." The guard didn't insist. He surely knew better than to waste his breath trying to apologize. She would shrug it off anyway, just like she had done other times before.

"You may return to your duties now, Guardsmen," Colonel Thorvald said.

The guards saluted and left the room while Elsa sat down on a nearby chair.

"So, tell me, Your Highness. How does that work?" the Colonel asked.

Elsa raised an eyebrow. "Your sword and shield. Shouldn't they shatter upon clashing against steel?"

"Oh, that," Elsa said. "They would, if they were made of normal ice. But I've learned how to compress it enough to make it as hard as steel."

"Amazing," the Colonel said.

"I learned it from a friend," she mumbled melancholically. "Would you like to see my armor?"

"You've also made yourself armor?"

Elsa smiled again. She turned her training outfit into a magnificently decorated suit of ice blue armor with the crest of Arendelle clearly visible on the breastplate. The Colonel was speechless. She chuckled as she replaced the armor with her royal dress.

"The trick is the same—highly compressed ice as hard as metal itself," she said. "And since the cold doesn't bother me—"

"Incredible," the Colonel breathed.

It is an incredible feat if I do say so myself, Elsa thought. At least something good came out of the whole ordeal with Sigurd.

Truth be told, had it not been because of that, she wouldn't have discovered the full extent of her abilities nor would she have felt inspired to exploit them. After that night nearly three years ago, 'Conceal, don't feel' had become a distant memory. Now she allowed herself to feel everything—anger, sadness, despair, surprise, joy, and whatnot—as love had become an ever-present feeling. This balance was what let her make unbelievable things while remaining fully in control of her powers.

Grand Pabbie had been right. Fear had been her enemy for a long time. But not anymore. If only her parents were here to see her—

"Well, even if the kingdom isn't under immediate threat from the outside, I'm glad you've used that excuse to devote yourself to these monthly training sessions. Seeing your progress has made me very proud, and I know your father would be, too."

Elsa looked at Colonel Thorvald and smiled gratefully. He was one of the oldest friends of the family. In fact, he and Elsa's father, King Agdar, had been the best of friends long before the latter's own coronation, so he probably knew him better than anyone. Thus, she took him at his word.

"Thank you," she said.

The Colonel nodded. "I think now it's time for you to return to your regular queenly duties, Your Majesty."

"Unfortunately," Elsa muttered as she stood. Not that she hated her position or the responsibilities that it brought, but ironically

enough, these training sessions were quite soothing for her. "I'll see you in a month."

Colonel Thorvald curtsied and went his own way. Elsa left the room, walking slowly, passing some maids and servants as she went. Everyone knew of her monthly training, but the way she behaved both before entering that room and after leaving it could've fooled anyone. She was still a Queen and knew how to act like one, even if she had taken to becoming a skilled warrior and fighter as well. Because, if so many kings in the past had led their armies into battle, why couldn't she? And if such a thing ever happened, she had to be ready.

Under normal circumstances, this kind of training would be regular, maybe even daily, but with all the royal responsibilities she had to attend to, time only allowed for a long day of training once every month. So far, she'd had 30 lessons of fencing, hand-to-hand combat, and a few other disciplines and fighting techniques Colonel Thorvald considered important. Of course, the man had been hesitant to teach her in the first place, but she had finally been able to convince him.

After all, this was more than just a whim. This was to protect her people.

Elsa had tried to forget Sigurd after his 'visit' to Arendelle, but his final words to her wouldn't stop ringing in her ears, resounding in her worst nightmares. A month after his departure, she'd sent some of her guards to try and learn of his current whereabouts.

Their findings were somewhat disturbing.

With his quest over, his army of volunteers had scattered, and all of the soldiers that had joined him had returned home. The most honorable of them had confided to the guards that they hadn't said a word about her actions, deeming them necessary given 'their' captain's own. A few others, however, had told the most heinous things about her after abandoning Sigurd, and while none of their respective kingdoms had any relations with Arendelle, they had become wary of her. She could only hope that they wouldn't think of going to war against Arendelle.

The more to the North her guards went, the more the trail grew cold. Eventually, following a dubious lead which was all they had left to follow, they found a cave deep in the forest, far beyond any of the kingdoms he had been through, and inside that cave, the decaying body of a man with the same clothing that the guards had seen Sigurd with, impaled with his own sword. He was almost beyond recognition, but according to the guards, those sideburns were unmistakable. They deduced that he had either killed himself or had been killed by any one of his remaining soldiers.

Elsa tried to draw comfort from that thought each morning as she woke up.

The rest of her day was just like any other: receiving people who wanted an audience with her, settling conflicts between townspeople, signing letters and treaties, attending to specific matters with her many advisors. The latter was one of the most annoying moments of her day, since they would keep pressing her to find a husband, and Elsa would keep telling them that she needed no husband to rule

Arendelle.

"If Queen Elizabeth I of England was able to rule without a king, so can I." That was Elsa's most common answer to their insistence.

By nightfall, she was exhausted. But today was a special day, and she still had one more thing to do.

* * *

><p>The cave looked almost the same as the first time she'd been here, minus the ice statues, of course. It was a good thing that no one had thought of venturing inside since Sigurd came. No one but her, anyway. And even if somebody did try, it would've been in vain. She had sealed the entrance that Sigurd had used to get inside, leaving only the one in the cliffs available.<p>

She approached the largest statue and caressed cold ice. "Hello, Wintergale."

Today was the third anniversary of the day she'd met Wintergale in this very same place, and just like she'd been doing for the past three years, she'd come to visit her dear friendâ€”in a symbolic sort of way, at least.

She sat beside the dragon statue and leaned against its right side. "So, what has happened since I came last year?" she thought out loud. Then she began telling the statue all of the day-to-day and mostly mundane stuff that had happened in Arendelle so far. She was done in five minutes, and then she started to ponder about the few things that mattered the most to Elsa and that she did want to tell her.

"Remember Kat, the little girl that was with me in the warehouse the first and only night you were at the town? You should see her now," she said, chuckling. "She's gonna become a beautiful young lady soon enough. She reminds me of Anna in a way. Bright, dauntless, brave. Her friend, Arvid, is also growing up pretty fast. He might become a Royal Guard someday.

"That reminds me, I've finally been able to fully master your little trick. Now I can make my own ice weapons and armor. I mean, I already could do it a year ago, but it used to take me a lot of time to make them perfectly whenever I tried, whereas now I can conjure them in an instant. That, and I've also learned how to use my ice-sensing ability to fight better. I guess now I could take on Sigurd if he still were alive."

She smiled. It was time for the happiest news of them all. "Anna and Kristoff finally got married three months ago. It was such a lovely wedding! And Anna looked so beautiful. I'm glad she managed to grow her hair back and that she had no scars left from that punch in the face she got from Sigurd." She sighed. "She deserves all the happiness she's got, and I'm so thankful to be part of it.

"They've been spending their honeymoon in Corona. That's where our cousin Rapunzel and her husband Eugene live. She offered to accommodate them in the tower she used to live all those years ago. It's located in a secluded valley in the forest not far from her kingdom. Aside from the fact that Punzie was a prisoner there for 18

years, the place has a nice ambiance and even a romantic air, from what I've been told. It's just perfect for the occasion.

"They took Olaf and Sven with them, too. I imagine Sven and Maximus are good friends by now, not to mention Olaf and Pascal. Just so you know, Maximus is the head of the Royal Guard of Corona"and believe it or not, he's a horse"and Pascal is Rapunzel's pet chameleon, so there's that. And Olaf must be enjoying himself there, considering his love for summer and that Corona has some of the nicest summers in this part of the world."

Elsa then became serious. "They're all due to return in a couple of days. The weather hasn't been too good lately. As a matter of fact, it was already starting to drizzle by the time I got here. I just hope that they return safely." Then she considered something. "I never told you how my parents died, did I? Their ship perished in open seas, during a storm. All I can hope is that the same thing doesn't happen to Anna and Kristoff. I don't know if I could live with the loss of my sister. But you already know that."

She touched the icy head of the statue. "I miss you, Wintergale. I don't regret letting you go and have a better, safer life. But what I wouldn't give to at least see you again" to fly with you just one more time."

Tears welled up in her eyes. How could she miss an animal so badly? But she did. And Wintergale wasn't just an animal. She was so much more than that.

She was a dragon, an Ice Fury.

And she was her friend.

She dozed off slowly until she fell sound asleep, leaning against the ice like she had done once with a certain white dragon.

* * *

><p>Elsa woke up before dawn the following morning and headed back to Arendelle for yet another day full of routine and boredom, but not before saying goodbye to the dragon ice statue and promising to return the next year with more news.<p>

She reached the cave entrance and boarded her ice sailboat which she had raised with an ice column the night before. Then she lowered the column until the boat touched the seawater and headed back home. She was back at Arendelle within the hour" |

"and was taken aback when she found that the town was covered in snow. Only the town.

Her heart felt as if it would jump out of her chest, for she knew full well who had been responsible for the last such odd event. She began looking around, wondering whether she should return to the caves, until she thought she'd heard the faintest roar in the distance.

No. She had heard a roar. And there it was again, carried by the wind from" | from where?

Her eyes then became fixed on the North Mountain. Could it be?

Another faint roar, definitely coming from the mountain.

Had her wish become true?

"Wintergale!" she breathed her dear friend's name.

* * *

><p>AN: You didn't really think I'd break Elsa and Wintergale apart for long, did you? ;)</p>

**Okay, here's the deal. I've made my calculations and I expect to be able to update at least two or three chapters every week. That is, except for the weeks when I decide to upload a new chapter for my other new crossover instead, but said updates will be less regular than these. So, rejoice! We're back in business.

**Now, here are the replies to Chapter 11 reviews (moved here from last chapter's A/N):

**Guest: ****Sorry about the hiatus, but don't worry, they will meet again... someday.

>White Hunter:_** Someday, indeed...** Thank you!*****_Art n' Music:_ If things go according to plan, they will. Thanks!**Bigby the Big Bad Wolf: Unfortunately, there are no plans to include Sigurd anymore. He was kind of an expendable secondary character. There will be mention of his fate, though, and yeah, it's not too good for him. Would've been nice to have Hiccup facing Sigurd, but it's just not gonna happen. I still hope you like the rest of the story. Thanks for the review!

>magiclover13:_** I'm glad to know I've been able to capture Elsa and Anna as closely *****to how the movie characters are *****as possible. (Did that phrase make any sense to you? I'm not sure if I wrote it correctly.) Thanks for pointing those little details out; I try to proofread the chapter all the time, but sometimes I just miss the little things such as that one. Part II will be epic! ...I hope, at least. You're welcome, and thank you***** for reviewing! P.S.: I'd love to hear your theory. I just can't get enough of the new season, and it hasn't even aired! Have you seen the pics of the live-action Queen Elsa yet?

>*****_*****_**Pabulover123**_*****:**_** Yay, baby Furies all around**! Black magic, hehehe. Thank you for your patience!*****_Sunny Lighter:_ No, that's just the end of Part I. We'll get to see more!amillipede: My, thank you for all the flattery! I'm glad you like this story. I'll try to update before a month so as to not keep

you waiting for long.

>Wrendragongirl: Thanks!

>Velvetpru'd: Thank you! I'm excited, too.

>ArmyWife22079**: _ I'm not evil! ...Not that much, anyway. And I agree with you; two months is still a lot of time, especially now with all the promotional images and else.

>alive-in-us_*****_*****:_ Sorry I had to do that to you. It was necessary. I'm glad you liked the interaction between them. (Spoiler alert: we'll get to see more of that in the following chapters.) And thanks for pointing out my mistakes; I've corrected them by now. Please tell me if you see any in this chapter.

>PureTempest: I'm relieved to see that you like the way I've depicted Elsa in this story. And don't worry, they will be reunited soon. This story is not Hiccelsa (yeah, I've finally made up my mind about that), but there will be a certain interaction between Hiccup and Elsa as well as with Valka. **Thank you!**

>Halley Vanaria: You got it! Thanks!

>PascalDragon:_** You're right, we'll see them together again. Hehe, yeah, the time frame is a tricky thing indeed. Did you get to see HTTYD2? And about Valkas reaction to Olaf and MM, I've come up with an idea to solve that later on... but you'll have to wait a couple of chapters to see it. And trust me, you'll love it**. Thanks for your review, Sven!*****

>eagle219406: I totally agree with you, which is why I've finally made up my mind beyond any shadow of doubt and decided against pairing Elsa with Hiccup. And thank you for your preference!

>moonfury: Thank you! You're right, I forgot to mention that last part. I've updated the final segment of Chapter 11 and added a small subtle comment about Sven's carrots. Can you find it? ;) And yeah, Elsa will see Wintergale again.

>Heyyyyy: Thank you for your suggestion. I already had an idea of how to bring Hiccup into the story, but I enjoyed your idea nonetheless.

>Guest:** Awww, thank you!

>fanfic fan81: Thank you so much for your kind words!

>hiccups-are-better: Hehehe, thanks!

>

146 reviews so far! And it's only been 11 chapters! Again, I'm utterly overwhelmed by this response. Thank you, everyone, for reading this story. I hope not to disappoint with Part II.

Just so you know, I have a Facebook page originally dedicated to followers of my first fanfic, but I've updated it to make it for you all. You can find the link in my profile page.

**One more thing: remember that new crossover I mentioned above? Get ready, Jelsa fans, 'cause I'm finally writing my own _Frozen+_ROTG_ story! Never thought I'd actually get any idea to write one, what

with all the Jelsa crossovers floating all over the web, but I did and now I'm uploading it here. I hope you'll enjoy it.**

That's all for now, folks. Don't forget to review on your way out! (Hehe, I imagine you already missed my final catchphrase.)

13. The Return

Elsa didn't wait for anyone to wake up in the castle. She left a message for Kai, telling him that she'd be gone for a couple of days, and then left running as fast as she could. She'd managed to reach the North Mountain within a single night once; surely she could do it again within a day. Heaven knew she had more than enough motivation.

And true enough, by nightfall she was at the foot of the staircase that lead to her Ice Palace, where Marshmallow stood guard as usual, curled up and unmoving.

"Marshmallow," she whispered in front of the 'boulder'.

The snowman rose slowly and smiled upon seeing Elsa. She looked at his crown and smiled as well. Luckily she'd found it after Sigurd's assault to the Palace. Oddly enough, the giant snowman looked better with it.

"Hey there, Marshmallow. How've you been?"

"Fine," he replied with his deep basso voice. "Elsa came to visit Marshmallow?"

"In part," she said, caressing his leg. "Listen, I was on my way back to Arendelle this morning, and I thought I'd heard something like a roar coming from here. You didn't happen to see or hear anything strange lately, did you?"

"Heard roars last night," he answered instantly, pointing at the peak of the mountain. "There."

Elsa's heart beat rapidly. "She was here," she thought out loud. Then she looked at Marshmallow. "Could you take me up there so I can have a look?"

Without another word, he picked her up gently and put her on his back. He approached the rock wall and began climbing. Elsa held on tightly. Her breaths came in shorter and faster pants with each step he took towards the top of the mountain. She expected to find the Ice Fury lying in wait for her, the last sunrays shining right behind her and making the snow glimmer beneath her feet like she were the queen of the mountain instead of Elsa.

But when they reached the peak, there was nothing.

Elsa climbed down from Marshmallow's back and looked everywhere around, hoping to find her hiding in the snow. But Wintergale was nowhere to be seen. She thought that maybe she was going crazy, but if both she and Marshmallow had heard the dragon, then it had to be somewhere close by. So, if Wintergale wasn't here—where could she be?

They returned to the Palace entrance, where Elsa thanked Marshmallow before he returned to his usual place and position. She walked up the staircase and entered her Palace as her mind tried to figure out where else Wintergale could've gone to. Perhaps she had returned to her old lair or maybe to the frozen lake further inside the mountain range, or maybe even to Arendelle. Elsa shuddered to think of what would happen if the dragon suddenly appeared in the town. Would the guards try to kill her? Would she fight back and kill some of them first?

Usually, when she came to the Palace in such a pensive state, her legs would automatically take her to the Heart of the Palace. This time, however, they took her straight to the bottom floor of the Tower, where she began walking in circles for a while as she considered every possibility and scenario. When her head finally hurt, she was forced to pause and breathe deeply. She looked up to see the first rays of moonlight shining through the ice, reflecting itself down the walls and lighting the whole place white.

She recalled the day when Sigurd came—and all the damage that that he had caused, either directly or indirectly. And yet, for some reason she'd never know, he had left the Palace standing. It was something she was grateful for; it made fixing the damage a lot easier. Now the place looked just the way it was before said assault.

Except for the floor she was standing on.

Then it hit her.

She could've used her ability to 'listen' to the ice to determine what was below, but she was too excited to wait. So, she simply reopened the ramp that lead to the large space below—a room that had remained sealed for three years on this side of the Palace, but not on the other. She ran down the pathway—and

and began shedding tears of joy when she saw a white dragon lying on the snowy ground, resting peacefully.

"Wintergale!" she squealed.

The dragon woke up at once and looked at her. It smiled and wagged its tail vigorously as it ran towards Elsa and Elsa towards it. The Snow Queen embraced the Ice Fury tightly while the latter crooned in joy and gladness.

"Oh, Wintergale," Elsa said amid tears. "I missed you so much."

They stayed like that for some time; how much, she couldn't tell. Eventually, they separated from each other—and that was when she noticed the small piece of paper rolled up and tied below Wintergale's neck.

"What have you got down there?" she wondered out loud as she untied the rope and retrieved the paper. It had no wax seal and was addressed simply to 'Queen Elsa', without any fancy additions to the title.

She already knew who the sender was.

Unrolling the letter, she began reading silently:

_Queen Elsa, _

I have to admit that I'm surprised I still remember how to write. It's been so long since the last time I held a quill. Needless to say, I had to find one, as well as some ink and paper, to do this. I guess I was lucky to find them in that abandoned village I once told you about.

You must be wondering what your Ice Fury is doing back in your kingdom, after all my insistence to take her with me. I'm still not sure if I've made the right choice by letting her return to you, but I'm afraid that, if she stays here, she might be at higher risk than by being with the person she first bonded with.

I've been meddling in Drago Bludvist's affairs for a long time, and now I fear it all might boomerang on me sooner rather than later. I never told you much about him, but for now, all you need to know is that he's been capturing and enslaving dragons for years. He might be coming for those I've saved from his clutches one day or another, and while I have more than enough dragons to fight back, bloodshed may be unavoidable. I'd rather not see any of my dragons die, but I'm preparing for the worst.

However, I can't risk the life of the last living Ice Fury. That's why I'm sending her back. She's smart, as you already know, and I've given her specific instructions on how to find you without revealing herself to your people. I certainly hope that you will be reading this sometime in the next few days. Otherwise, Wintergale will be returning to me.

I don't know if that Sigurd guy has tried to make you pay for what you did to him, but I expect your kingdom may still be safely under your rule and care. I hate having to add another burden to you after what we discussed, but if I should trust any human, then that has to be you. And I must learn to trust you more than I already do.

Take care of Wintergale. Gods willing, I'll come visit you once this storm has passed.

The letter was not signed. The dragon rider's name would apparently remain a mystery to Elsa. _So much for trust_, she thought.

But she didn't care now. Her dearest friend was back.

And she would never again let her go.

* * *

><p>Elsa woke up a while after midnight, judging from the position of the moon shining through the almost transparent ceiling. She feared that she was only waking up from a beautiful dream and that it would turn out to be just that. But when she saw the white dragon sleeping at the foot of her bed, she couldn't help a huge smile. This was no dream. This was real.<p>

She looked to her right, to the bedside table made of the same material as virtually everything else in this Palace. The rider's

letter was resting on top of it. She took it and stood up from the bed, walking out of her room in the Tower and towards the balcony in the Heart of the Palace. She read it again carefully. There was something bothering her about the apparent rush in which it seemed to have been written.

In all truth, she was worried. The Viking woman had seemed strong and confident enough to Elsa when they met. Could things really be so bad that she had been forced to send Wintergale back in fear that the Ice Fury would be killed if it stayed in her sanctuary? What if she needed help? Could Elsa be of any help?

Her mind was reeling with similar questions. She was concerned, preoccupied, but her feelings didn't manifest through her powers. She smiled. Three years ago, she might've been more of a burden than a helping hand to the Viking woman, but now that her powers were under control all the time, even subconsciously, she might as well be of assistance.

She stared at the moon. Perhaps she was meant to do more than just stay and rule a kingdom. True, it was a big responsibility, but so was what she did with her powers. Who knew? Maybe all of the training she had underwent in the past few years had been for this very moment. Or maybe she was just fooling herself, trying to be something she was not.

No. What she was feeling in her heart was something more powerful than that. It was like—like a calling, one too strong and profound to ignore.

Elsa felt a sudden nudge on her right side. She turned and met Wintergale's curious and wondering gaze. She smiled. "Hi, Wintergale. Can't sleep either?"

The dragon growled softly.

"You must be worried for her, too. Would you like me to go back to the sanctuary with you to check up on her, see if she needs any help?"

The Ice Fury's eyes widened. It smiled back at her. Elsa looked up again, to the sky and beyond the horizon.

"Then I guess we'll be taking a trip to the North soon."

* * *

><p>AN: Oooohhh, what might Elsa be planning to do?
(Redundant question, I know.)
>

Quick update this time, just to let you know that I'm most definitely devoting myself to writing more chapters for this story, and also because next week I'll have my finals and I may not be able to update like I'd want to... and also because the next thing in my update list is a new chapter for my Jelsa crossover. Gotta keep it as close to the top of the list of crossovers as possible to gain more readers and all that.

**Yeah, a review-greedy friend of mine who also writes fanfiction

may've rubbed off on me.**

But anyway, I'm grateful to see that this story hasn't been forgotten. 17 reviews in less than 72 hours! What am I gonna do when we get to Chapter 20 or so? Please stop reviewing so much! (Just kidding, please _don't_ stop reviewing. Your words are the highlight of my day.)

****_Bigby the Big Bad Wolf:_ Thanks for the review! I hope you liked the reunion between Elsa and Wintergale, and we'll get to see her meeting both Hiccup and the Bewilderbeast sooner than later.

>GraceSophia: Wow. Never thought I'd get to make someone's birthday by updating this story. I hope you had a really nice day! And thank you for your kind words. Did you enjoy the reunion?

>Halley Vanaria: Sure, I will! Thanks!

>PascalDragon:_** Really?! So, what did you think of the film? Did you like it? Yeah, remember when I said that I couldn't let the statues be destroyed? Now you know why.** Thanks for your review, Sven!
>*****_PureTempest:_ **Thank you!** I'm looking forward to more reviews from you.**

>magiclover13:_** Oh, I missed your reviews! Thank you! I enjoyed that first scene, too. You know, that's why I love Elsa so much. She's such a strong character, and even more so by the end of the movie. That's why I have trouble reading other FFs where she's still depicted as fearful and shy, because I truly believe that she's not going back to what she used to be. I guess that's also why I've got mixed feelings about the way they want to depict her in OUAT, according to the producers. Then again, Georgina Haig as Elsa... can't say no to that. (Fanboy here, sorry.) BTW, I'm still waiting for that PM with your theories.*****

>Guest: Sorry, not yet. But soon, my friend, we'll see Toothless soon.

>Art n' Music: Oh, yeah, they're definitely back! And yes, she'll meet them soon enough.****

>Azlea: It's my pleasure, and even more so with reviews such as yours. Thanks!

>Pabulover123_****:**_** Hehe, her inner Mulan... Mobiles, they're such a pain sometimes. But I got your PM with the rest of your review alright, and thank you for your thoughts. I've already replied to it, but would there be any problem if I include the rest of your review next time for everyone else to read it?*****

>White Hunter:_** Oh, yes, they will.** Thank you!*****

>ArmyWife22079**:_ Now that would be sooooo awesome! Imagine Toothless going Super Saiyan in the show! If

>MysteryGirl17Freak:_ I've got a Whovian friend, so I know what you mean. I'm glad you liked the statues scene. And about Auntie Elsa... *grins widely* Thanks for reviewing!

>Crystall2: Well, she had three years to keep exploiting her abilities, so I had to give her something really awesome to do with them. And we're just getting started. You might still see another new ability or two in the near future. Thank you for reviewing!

>Guest: Why, thank you so much!
>Guest:** Well, I visited his profile page, and I think we'd be writing something more along the lines of sci-fi if we were to team up. Thanks for the suggestion and the review, Alt. quest.!

****No promises, but if my finals are not that difficult, I will be updating next week. Until then...****

****P.S.: Have you checked my Facebook page yet? You can find the link in my profile description. See you!****

The sound of cheering and shouting compelled Anna to lean on the starboard rail of her ship to see what the entire ruckus was about. She felt overwhelmed when she saw what had to be every last person in Arendelle waiting for her at the fjord, both aboard any ships available and at the docks. She shed a tear of happiness.

Though she did giggle a bit when she heard the nickname Kristoff liked to call her byâ€"which obviously made allusion to her love for chocolateâ€", Anna couldn't speak. She'd never imagined her people would give her such a warm welcome. She always tried to visit them and spend time with them whenever possible, and usually, people would tell her how wonderful a princess she was, but thisâ€

"I missed this place," she breathed.

Anna smiled. Corona had been nice, and Rapunzel and Eugene had been really kind with her and Kristoff. Some of their people had also treated her so nicely. _But there's no place like home._

"Look!" Olaf exclaimed from the bowsprit of the ship. "Elsa came to

see us!"

Upon hearing this, Anna rushed to the base of the bowsprit and caught a glimpse of a beautiful young woman dressed in an ice blue dressâ€”definitely her sister. She couldn't wait to tell her the news. It felt like ages before the ship was moored, and when the ramp was finally lowered, she ran down from the ship and embraced her sister.

"Welcome back, Anna," Elsa said into her ear. "How was your honeymoon?"

"Wonderful. The best honeymoon I've ever had."

"It's the only one you've ever had."

"Precisely," Anna replied, smiling widely. "And I have a surprise for you."

"Really?" Elsa said, letting go of her sister. But before Anna could elaborate, she added, "That's funny. I have a surprise for you, too."

"Do you now?" Anna teased.

Elsa nodded and smiled. "Why don't you follow me to the castle so I can show it to you?"

Anna didn't fail to notice that Elsa's smile was somewhat weak, nostalgic even. But as Elsa walked away and gestured at her to follow, she decided that maybe it was just because of the third anniversary of the day when Wintergale came to Arendelle. She'd let Elsa give Anna her surprise first. No matter what it was, it would surely make telling her the news so much more shockingâ€”and fun. Oh, the face she'd makeâ€”

Kristoff, Olaf, and Sven came down from the ship and joined her, and as they passed by the townspeople and greeted some of them, she became aware that the whole town was following them to the castle. Then, as she approached the gates, she noticed a six-foot tall ice platform sitting at the back of the courtyard, right between the two fountains. Elsa disappeared behind it, but when Anna tried to follow her, the Royal Guards stopped her and led her to the front of the platform.

The courtyard became filled within minutes, and then Elsa reappeared on the platform, along with Kai and Gerda who stood on the corners to her right and left respectively. Kai waited for the people to quiet down a little before stepping forward.

"Her Majesty, Queen Elsa of Arendelle!" he announced loudly.

The crowd erupted in cheers, and Elsa had to wait for them to stop before she could speak. "Citizens of Arendelle, today we welcome back our beloved Princess and my dearest sister, Anna."

Again, the crowd cheered. Anna blushed and smiled humbly, nodding to some nearby people before lowering her head slightly.

"We all know how much all of usâ€”and in fact, the worldâ€”owes to

Anna. Had it not been for her bravery and sacrifice four years ago, the eternal winter I unwittingly unleashed would've this kingdom and many othersâ€¦ and I wouldn't be here today. Anyone else would've cared less about saving my life as long as they brought summer back, but not her. Even though I myself told her to leave me alone, she didn't give up on me. That speaks highly of her character. She is not easily shaken by the situations around her and has faith that things will get better, no matter how grim they may look. Moreover, she has the will to make things get better. Truly, you couldn't ask for a better rulerâ€¦ or a better sister."

While Anna felt flattered, it wasn't lost on her that Elsa had used the word 'ruler' when she had previously used the word 'princess'.

"Three years ago," Elsa continued, "an army came to Arendelle with the purpose of hunting down and slaying a creature they called the 'ice monster'. Their mad leader went as far as trying to kill me and my sister when he thought that I was helping the beast. Eventually, I drove him away, making it clear to him that I'd be less merciful if he ever set foot again in this kingdom. Most of you wouldn't know all this since you had to spend every night locked inside your homes because of a curfew he convinced me to establish, supposedly to keep you safe.

"Today, I'm here to tell you that, despite his madness, he was right about something. I did help the creature he sought to slay."

This statement caused a soft whispering to rise among the townspeople. Anna wondered why Elsa would disclose this information now.

"You should know as well that he was wrong about something, too. This was no monster but a magnificent creature I thought extinct centuries ago. I saved it, while he would've killed it and annihilated the last of its species. I sent it away to keep it safe from him, and to this day, it has survived and thrived."

Of course Anna knew who Elsa was talking about, but she sounded absolutely certain about her fate. Had she received word from the dragon rider she'd told her about?

"I know that if you saw this creature, you would think the same as I do. So, behold, the ice monster," Elsa said, lifting her left hand as if to introduceâ€¦

Wait. Could this actually be happening? Anna finally noticed the white blur behind the ice platform. And it was moving.

Her heart leapt when she saw an all too familiar animal approaching Elsa from behind. She heard several gasps and even a few shrieks among the crowd. Wintergale, however, seemed calm and unfazed, not showing any signs of being upset by such a reaction.

Elsa had promised her a surprise. 'Surprise' was too short a word to describe what Anna was feeling now. When had Wintergale returned? And more importantly, why?

"Don't be alarmed!" Elsa shouted out. "There's no need to panic. She's not dangerous."

When the crowd saw that Wintergale indeed remained impassive, it slowly began falling silent. Anna became aware that the Royal Guards hadn't as much as flinched when the white dragon showed up. Had Elsa already told them about it?

"This is my dragon, an Ice Fury. Her name is Wintergale, and she is one of the most amazing animals I've ever seen. She's also the last living specimen of her species. But you should know that she's not the _last_ dragon in the world."

The townspeople were absolutely attentive now, but some of them still stared at Wintergale nervously.

"I have been reliably informed that there are thousands of dragons still alive out there. Their survival is one of the best kept secrets in this worldâ€¦ and yet, there are some people who know of their existence and who would capture and use them to do terrible things."

She caressed Wintergale before continuing. "I've revealed the truth of her existence to you all, because I know that you will accept herâ€¦ just like you accepted me. You didn't trust me at first when my powers were revealed to you, and I cannot blame you. But now you all know that when I fled to the North Mountain, I did so in order to keep you safe from me, even though I didn't know back then that I had only made things worse. Then I learned how to control my powers and undo the damage that I had caused, and ever since, everything I have done for you I have done out of love. Thus, I hope that you will understand me now.

"We all know that there are many dangers in the world, but there are some worse than others and which we may not be prepared for. There are also good people out there, people who might have it in their hearts to stand by our side. I have decided to find both thingsâ€¦possible enemies that might be a threat to this kingdom, and allies to side with so we can fend those enemies off."

The murmuring began again, while Anna was trying to understand what Elsa had just said and hoping that it didn't mean what she feared it meant. But then she noticed that as her sister spoke, she was moving her fingers slightlyâ€¦and that, as she did so, her heels were becoming boots that ended below her knee, and navy blue pants were starting to appear under her dress. Then, when she said the last words, the dress was shortened so that the hem was just past the top of her thighs and the slit to the right rose to the bottom of her hip, losing the intricate ice details in the process. A belt appeared out of nowhere right at waist level, and the cape was also shortened and darkened as the otherwise transparent and delicate fabric was reinforced, becoming a turquoise cloak.

The crowd gasped again when this transformation took place, and it was quite understandable. Elsa now looked like some sort of woodsman or explorer instead of like a queen. Then again, apparently she would _be_ an explorer soon enoughâ€¦ and leave her alone. Again.

"I am leaving Arendelle for some time," Elsa announced after a rather dramatic pause. "not because I really want to but because I _need_ toâ€¦ because I have been given a wonderful gift which cannot remain hidden, not when I can use it to protect youâ€¦ my beloved

people.

"This is not a farewell, for I will return to you once my mission is complete. Until then, I am appointing Princess Anna to rule in my stead. Be good and loyal to her as you have been to me, and fear not, for I leave you in the best hands."

Anna had almost yelled 'What?!' when she heard this, but her shock was too big to let her utter a word. Of all the things she had imagined would happen upon her return, her sister's departure from Arendelle had definitely not been one of them. What if she didn't return? What if something bad happened to her?

What if she never saw her again?

"I love you all," Elsa said. "No queen could ask for better subjects. You've made me feel at home instead of as an outcast. You are my family, and there is nothing I wouldn't do for you. I pray I will be able to return to you safely." She seemed lost for words. A tear rolled down her face, and with a quaky voice, she concluded, "I love you."

She began walking away along with Wintergale, when suddenly, a voice among the crowd shouted out, "Long live Elsa, Snow Queen of Arendelle!"

Anna and Elsa turned around in unison, searching for whoever had said those words, but then more and more people began chanting them. Anna thought of it as one of the most touching gestures ever, and judging from the expression on Elsa's face, she seemed to agree. More tears were flowing down her face.

Then she realized that the Royal Guards to her right were making way for her to walk to the back of the platform. She didn't; she ran to catch up with Elsa, who had already walked down the ramp with Wintergale, before she left. Behind the ice, several more guards were readying the Ice Fury, securing a special saddle behind her neck along with two saddlebags of considerable size beneath her right and left wings each. There was also a small satchel hanging from the saddle.

Despite everything, she was glad to see the white dragon alive and well.

"Hey, Wintergale," she said, approaching it. "Remember me?"

The dragon smiled and crooned softly when she saw her. Anna put a hand on top of her head and caressed it softly.

"It's good to see you again, Wintergale," she said softly.

She heard three sets of footsteps behind her—"a man's, a snowman's, and a reindeer's. The snowman's became faster, and suddenly, there were a pair of stick arms around one of the dragon's legs.

"Wintergale!" Olaf exclaimed gleefully.

The dragon turned its head downwards to 'kiss' the snowman. Thankfully, the kiss was nothing more than a soft touch from her lips

on his head, or the snowman would've ended up soaking wet. Anna decided to give the two a few minutes to reminisce of the fun time they had at the Palace three years before. As the Guards filled one of the saddlebags with lots of fish and the other with regular food such as bread and fruitâ€”and _lots_ of chocolate, of courseâ€”, she approached Elsa who was talking to the head of the Royal Guard, Colonel Thorvald.

"Elsa?" she said, trying to call for her sister's attention.

Elsa turned around for a moment before excusing herself with the Colonel and walking up to where she was. "Anna, I'm sorry," she said, holding both of her sister's hands. "I thought of flying with Wintergale to find your ship and tell you in advance, but I wanted to make sure that everything would be in order so that things would be easier for you once I left."

"It's okay, Elsa," Anna tried to reassure her, but she didn't sound too convinced about it herself.

Elsa gave her a knowing look. "No, it's not."

Anna lowered her head. "No, it's not." Then she looked into her eyes. "Do you really have to go? And most of all, do you have to go now? Couldn't you wait a few more days before leaving?"

Elsa said nothing. She just pulled out of the satchel a piece of wrinkled paper with writing on one of its sides and handed it to her. Anna took it and read itâ€”and understood why the rush.

"Time is pressing," Elsa told her. "I could try and find this Drago on my own, but I know nothing about fighting dragons, and he has an entire army of them. Wintergale and I can't possibly hope to face such a challenge, not alone. We need the rider's assistance as much as she might need ours. Perhaps if I can help her somehow, she'll be willing to help us in return. But none of that will happen if Drago gets to her first."

Anna nodded her understanding, but she still couldn't quite accept it.

"You know, I have to put the blame of my decision to leave on you," Elsa said.

"On me?!" Anna squealed.

"Your adventurous spirit has been rubbing off on me for some time now, so yeah, it's kind of your fault that I'm going," she teased her, winking.

Anna smiled and chuckled. "Okay, guilty," she said. Then she sobered again. While she was now on the same page as Elsa, still felt uneasy about that other thing. Did she have what it took to actually rule a kingdom?

"Hey, Anna, don't worry. I know you'll do a fine job while I'm away," Elsa reassured her, almost like she'd read her mind. "I have absolute faith in you. You have the makings of greatness in you. And you won't do it alone. You'll have the finest advisors there to guide you, not to mention your husband Kristoff."

Anna smiled softly. "You really think I'll be able to do it?"

"With all my heart," Elsa replied, putting a hand on her shoulder. "You'll be fine, Anna."

Those words struck a chord. Anna knew that those were the same words their parents had told Elsa before leaving.

And they never returned.

"You wanted to tell me something, didn't you?" Elsa said. "Something about a surprise?"

A lump began forming on Anna's throat. Her fear of losing Elsa was back, and now she needed reassurance that she'd see her again. She took a deep breath to contain the sobs. "Come back safe, and I'll tell you all about it."

Elsa seemed taken aback by this reply for a moment. Then she smiled and nodded. "I will."

"You promise?" Anna insisted.

Elsa took her hands between hers once more. "I promise."

Anna sighed. Colonel Thorvald chose that moment to approach the sisters. "Your Majesty," he said, bowing. "Your dragon is ready."

"Thank you, Colonel. For everything," she replied. Then she looked at Anna. "I will return, Anna. We will be fine, remember?"

Anna recalled the day when Elsa told her those words. She smiled. They had been fine in the end, despite all that they had to go through with Sigurd. "We will be fine," she repeated.

Both sisters embraced. When they separated, Elsa approached Kristoff who had kept his distance so far. "Just like my kingdom, I know that my sister is left in the best hands. I'm so glad to have you as my brother-in-law, and I know that you'll take good care of her."

"I will, Elsa. Thanks," he replied.

"And whom will I look after?" Olaf asked behind them.

Elsa knelt and placed a hand on the snowman's tiny shoulder. "Why, you'll look after all three of them—Anna, Kristoff, and even Sven. So, you see, in a way, the whole kingdom depends on you." She put a serious face but was unable to hide that look of complicity. "Can you do it?"

"I can, Elsa! You can count on me," Olaf answered, giving her a thumbs-up.

Elsa rose and climbed onto Wintergale's back. Anna walked towards the dragon and held its head between her hands.

"Make sure she keeps her promise, okay, Wintergale?" she told the Ice Fury. The dragon crooned in response. Anna then looked at Elsa and

said, "Be safe."

"And you," Elsa replied. Anna noticed that she was holding back the tears as much as she was.

Elsa led the dragon back up the ramp and to the top of the platform, upon which the cheering and shouting rose in volume once more. Anna rushed back to the front of the platform seconds before Wintergale jumped a few feet into the air and hovered above the ice to let Elsa thaw it. Anna looked up and met Elsa's tearful gaze.

"I love you, Elsa," she mouthed.

"I love you too, Anna," was Elsa's equally mouthed reply.

And with a soft pat from Elsa on Wintergale's neck, the dragon took flight. The racket from the crowd around Anna faded away as she saw her sister become smaller and smaller until she was nothing more than a small dot in the horizon.

and until the tears in her eyes blurred her vision.

* * *

><p>Five days later, the dawn found a young queen and a white dragon gliding over the *Northern Ocean after a well-deserved night-long rest. The increasing amount of ice floating on the water and the lower-than-usual temperatures were becoming a clear sign that they were reaching inhospitable regions which ordinary people would avoid. Then again, if history books were any indication, Vikings were not ordinary people. As for the dragons, surely a race of animals that could breathe fire would have no problem adapting their environment, no matter how far to the North they went.

This was indeed a great place to remain hidden for as long as necessary, even hundreds of years.

"You really flew all this way to return to Arendelle?" Elsa asked Wintergale.

The dragon growled softly, and Elsa took it as a 'yes'.

"I imagine you had to fish your own food, eh?" she told her, pulling a large fish out of the saddlebag to her left. She brought the fish close to Wintergale's mouth, and the dragon took it from her hand, careful not to bite her. "What I still don't understand is, where did you rest? Did you risk venturing into the mainland at night?"

Wintergale made a short gurgling noise which Elsa assumed meant 'not really'. For the past four nights, Elsa had been creating small icebergs for them to sleep on and thawing them once the sun came up. She knew that Wintergale was capable of making her own ice slabs, so perhaps she could also make larger ice formations if necessary. Or she could've just found a nice cave in a cliff, as she had when she came to Arendelle.

In truth, there was still so much Elsa had to learn both from and about Wintergale. The time they had spent together hadn't been

enough, but hopefully, she'd get the chance to make up for it from now on.

"Well, if you don't mind," she said, taking a piece of bread and pair of chocolates from the saddlebag to her right, "I'll just have a snack of my own while weâ€¦"

She didn't finish the phrase. Her train of thought was lost when she spotted something in the distanceâ€¦ something which didn't seem to be natural. And as they flew closer, she realized why.

It was an island in the middle of the partially frozen ocean, protected by an ice barrier which seemed more natural, and from which a _massive_ blast of ice seemed to emerge, ice spikes pointing out menacingly in all directions. It was both a fearsome and a breathtaking sight unlike anything her world had ever seen.

This had to be the rider's dragon sanctuary.

Suddenly, Wintergale began snarling. She looked agitated.

"What is it, girl?" Elsa asked.

The answer didn't come from Wintergale but from a _flock_ of dragons which, without any warning, appeared from the clouds above and surrounded them. They all snarled, baring their teeth at the Ice Fury, until the latter roared loudly in return, upon which all of the other dragons fell silent and lowered their heads ever so slightly. Elsa was in shock, both of seeing so many different dragons and of the apparent authority and respect Wintergale seemed to command from them.

"How did youâ€¦?" Elsa began, but another roar cut her offâ€¦ a rather familiar one.

She looked up, and there it wasâ€¦ a four-winged dragon slowly descending from the clouds overhead until it and Wintergale were level. And of course, its rider was standing on its back, her face concealed behind that tusked leather mask.

"Queen Elsa?" she asked, sounding quite upset. "What in the name of Thor are you doing here?!"

* * *

><p>*Maps from that time period didn't use the name "Arctic Ocean" as we do nowadays, instead using the term "Northern Ocean". I'm just telling you to avoid confusion._

* * *

><p>AN: Elsa has found the sanctuary! We're getting closer to HTTYD2...

>

**I'm working right now on Chapter 15 which will include something I believe you'll like. Not a song this time, but it is something nice. It should be ready by Sunday night if everything goes according to plan; if not, then it will be ready by Monday night. After that, I'm afraid you'll have to wait another week or two for the next update

'cause my laptop's screen has been a bit out of whack lately and I'm gonna have to take it someplace where they can repair it. Unfortunately, since my laptop is my only working computer right now, it is also the only tool I have to update my stories, so...**

I've forgotten to clarify something that probably doesn't need clarification but which I will mention anyway. Elsa's new 'ice-sensing ability' is somewhat similar to Toph's ability to sense vibrations on the earth in Avatar: The Last Airbender. In fact, that's where the idea came from. I hope you liked that, and if you did, let me tell you right now that you'll also get to see another variant of that ability later on. And speaking of references, did any of you catch the reference to Treasure Planet in this chapter?

Okay, now, let's get to the replies to the 16 reviews for Chapter 13:

*****_Art n' Music:_ Don't worry, I can tell you that it is happening just a few weeks before HTTYD2.**** Thanks for the review!

>*****_**_ArmyWife22079_**:_ Oh, I know Dreamworks made HTTYD. What I meant is that, since OUAT belongs to ABC"which in turn belongs to Disney", they would have to be the ones to authorize the inclusion of a storyline made by a rival film company. Sadly, that's the same issue Jelsa shippers like me have to cope with, with ROTG also being Dreamworks' and all that. Still, a guy can dream... And as for the plot and the pairing you mentioned, yeah, I enjoy them both. And at least they won't be pairing Elsa with anyone in the series, so that's something else I'm looking forward to.** BTW, if you still haven't seen Season 3, I suggest you hurry up because we're only a bit over a month before the premiere!

>*****_*****_***Pabulover123**_*****:**_** Thank you! I did feel like it should be a more sweet***** reunion. I'm glad you liked it. And... you reviewed again from your mobile, didn't you? 'Peter' instead of 'letter', from what you told me. Hehe, tends to happen.

>UnknownBlackHand: Sooner rather than later. Two more chapters!

>GraceSophia: Thank you! I'm glad you enjoyed the reunion and hope that their departure didn't make you cry.

>*****_MysteryGirl7Freak:_ *****Nah, there's no reason to have that feeling... yet. *evil smile***** Thanks for the review!

>*****_Crystal12:_ Thank you! Yeah, you and me both are looking forward to that meeting.

>*****_*****_*****_**alive-in-us**_*****_***** **:_ I know, right? They're just so adorable! Thanks for reviewing!

>*****_**magiclover13:**_** Maybe?! Do you really think I'm that mean? Well, I'm not... that much. Only a little. ;) Thank you as always for such encouraging words!*****

>*****_**White Hunter:**_** Well, now Anna is

in charge of things, so that has freed Elsa to leave for a while.** I hope you liked this chapter, and thank you for reviewing!*****

>*****_PureTempest:_ O_O Have you been spying on me as I write? 'Cause, seriously, I laughed so hard when I read your review because **I had just finished Elsa's speech to her people and your thoughts just matched what I'd just written! Thank you!** I hope this chapter lived up to your expectations.** (BTW, I was listening to one of the tracks from the original soundtrack of HTTYD, the one titled 'Romantic Flight', as I was translating the final part of the speech, and I nearly cried. Just a thought here...)

>*****_Heyyyyy:_ Just two more chapters! Don't worry!

>lady:** I'm glad you liked the idea. Thanks!

>*****_**PascalDragon:**_** Yeah, Elsa wouldn't just leave without Anna knowing. And, seriously? You didn't actually cry? 'Cause I did, and I cried a lot, even when I was already spoiled and aware of it. I guess 'aware' isn't the same as 'mentally and emotionally prepared'. Still, I'm glad you enjoyed the movie, and I hope you'll go watch it again a few more times, because you'll want to remember some of those scenes as you read the next chapters. ** Thanks for your review, Sven!

>*****_Emori Loul:_ You noticed! You did notice that! Oh, thank you for pointing that out. That's in fact one of the many reasons why I began writing this story, because I couldn't understand how Valka could know so much about Night Furies without actually having been near them. Thanks for reviewing!

>Bteam: Yes, he will, and sooner now rather than later. Thanks, and I will keep on going!

>****

*****Pabulover123 attempted to write a review for Chapter 12, but his mobile cut it short, so he had to send it to me via PM. I'm uploading said message with his authorization for those who enjoy reading both the reviews and my replies to them:

>The scene with Elsa talking with the ice statue of Wintergale was so moving and really shows her connection to Wintergale even after three years.

> so Anna and Kristoff are having a honeymoon suite in the tower... Maybe we'll not only see Fury babies in the future...

> Quick Question: are you planning at any point to have the perspective from a resident of Berk or is it focused on Arendelle only?

> Can't wait until the next chapter, it's great hearing from you again!*****

*****That's all for now. See you guys soon!*****

*****Oh, and don't forget to review on your way out!*****

Elsa didn't know what to say at first. The dragon rider sounded quite upset about her presence here, and for a moment, she wondered whether she had made a mistake by coming to the North. But she was already here, and the worst that could happen was that the rider said no to her offer of assistance.

She breathed deeply and finally replied, "I've come here to help you."

The Viking woman stiffened. "What?"

"I've come to help you," Elsa repeated.

She could almost see the rider narrowing her eyes at her. "Help me?"

Elsa reached inside her satchel and took the letter the rider had sent her. "You sent Wintergale back with this tied beneath her neck, didn't you?" she asked, showing her the piece of paper. The rider didn't reply, but she seemed to recognize it. "From what you told me here, I assumed that you were in danger and might needâ€"

"I told you in that letter specifically to take care of Wintergale," the rider snapped. "I told you to keep her safe, not to expose her to danger by bringing her back here!"

"I am taking care of her," Elsa argued. "And she isn't in danger yet, not as long as we're together. I don't have to remain in Arendelle to protectâ€"

"This is no place for a queen!" the rider countered. "Your kingdom needs you more than I do."

"I left my sister Anna in charge of Arendelle, and I know she can do a fine job. Besides, I can't put my abilities to good use there, not the way I can here in the thick of battle."

"Ah, yes, your abilities. I remember everything about them, including your admitting that in the extreme rare occasion you would lose control over them. So, unless you've finally mastered them with an absolute control, I don't really see how you could be of any help without putting us all inâ€"

Elsa, who had been expecting to hear that argument, cut the Viking off by flicking her fingers and causing a sudden gust of icy wind to blow in front of her and her Stormcutter. Then she waved her hands with wide movements, summoning dark clouds that blocked the sunlight and unleashed a fierce snowstorm that surrounded all of the dragonsâ€"but there was not a single snowflake that touched them, as each of them was safe inside an air bubble, almost like each dragon were inside the eye of a storm. Several of the dragons recoiled, but not even then did the 'bubble' stop protecting them from the cold winds.

The dragon rider looked all around her, visibly stunned by this display of power. Then she moved her staff slightly, and instantly, fire came against Elsa from the maws of several dragons. The Snow Queen, however, knowing that the Viking was testing her, didn't lose calm and simply snuffed out the flames with an even stronger gust of wind and snow. She decided to add an even more dramatic touch by

raising her palm to command all of the snow particles in the air to stand still for a few seconds before making the ice and snow and clouds disappear with one last twirl of her hands. The morning sun shone brightly once more.

"I'm not here out of entirely selfless reasons, dragon rider," Elsa said, now that she obviously had the Viking's undivided attention. "When you told me to let Wintergale come to your sanctuary, I knew somehow that you would be able to protect her. I understood that, while you were fighting a war to protect dragons, you were also keeping 'my world' safe from the dangers of yours. Then you sent me this letter, and I feared for the lives of my people, because if you could no longer keep your own world safe from this Drago Bludvist, then there would be nothing to stop him from harming mine. I can't let that happen."

She raised the letter for the rider to see it again. "You said here that bloodshed might be unavoidable and that you could lose many dragons in the battle. But maybe I can help you prevent it altogether _and_ save my people in the process. You were hoping that the storm would pass? Well, I say we let the storm rage onâ€"a storm of ice and fire so fearsome that Drago Bludvist will think twice before coming up against us again."

The rider remained silent for a long while, her dragons hovering in the same place, waiting for instructions. Eventually, she made an almost imperceptible movement with her staff, and her Stormcutterâ€"Cloudjumper, if memory servedâ€"flew away, back towards the sanctuary, with the other winged creatures in tow. And even though she hadn't say a word to her, Elsa saw this as an invitation to at least see it more closely.

"Come on, Wintergale," she told her dragon. "Show me the way."

The Ice Fury complied, following the Viking closely. They flew into an opening in the ice, weaved through a few passages, and reached the inside of the nest.

Elsa's jaw dropped.

There were no words to describe the beauty of what lay within the gigantic ice shell she'd seen from the outside. It was a magnificent green paradise that didn't seem to fit in this icy region and defied nature simply by existing here. The foliage was like nothing Elsa had ever seen, nurtured by the water of a hundred waterfalls that flowed into a large lake that spanned the entire sanctuary. Even the temperature inside was warmer, a lot more so than in Arendelle during the best of summers. And truly, _thousands_ of different dragons flew and roamed freely all over the place. The rider had been right to say that she came from another world, for that was precisely what this was.

This was the world of dragons.

This had been Wintergale's home for the past three years.

The Stormcutter landed on a small cliff near one of the waterfalls, followed by the Ice Fury. Both their riders got off their backs, the Viking walking up to the moss-covered edge, and the Queen staying a few feet behind her. None of them uttered a word for a long while, so

Elsa just took in the overwhelming view of this lost paradise and its inhabitants, trying to count as many different dragon species as possible, hoping deep inside her heart that the rider would let her stay and teach her all about them. After all, she had to know the world she would be attempting to save along with her kingdom.

"It's amazing how you can grow so attached to a place that's not really yours," the rider finally said, taking off her mask. "It didn't even take me a year to start calling this sanctuary my home and these dragons my family. Now imagine how I feel after living among them for 20 years."

Elsa nodded. She knew the feeling. "You love them with all your heart, don't you? Probably as much as you loved your husband and child. There is nothing you wouldn't do for them."

The rider sighed. "I promised I'd do whatever I could to keep them safe or die trying. Imagine how desperate I am that I've even been praying for a miracle to any god out there who would listen." She then turned to Elsa. "Since you're already here, I think a meeting between royals is in order. Come with me."

Elsa obeyed and followed the Viking through the somewhat narrow outcropping. They seemed to be heading towards the largest waterfall whereâ€

Her knees buckled when she saw what had to be the most massive creature on Earth sleeping peacefully in the lakeâ€a titanic white dragon with two big tusks, long spines protruding from the back of its head and forming a sort of frilled headdress, and smaller burr-like spikes covering its face, along with two lines of spikes along the eyelids which gave an impression of eyebrows. It seemed to sense the presence of the two humans once they were close enough to its resting place, for it opened its eyes and rose to meet them.

Being a queen herself, and recalling the rider's account of her arrival to the nest and the words she had used to describe its creator, Elsa recognized the mightiness and authority of this creature and felt the need to bow down in respect and reverence, along with the rider and the other two dragons, to the king of all dragons. _The Bewilderbeast._

The colossal king made a low-pitched growl that seemed uncharacteristic of a creature of this size. Elsa felt its gaze upon her. Her heart beating rapidly, she dared to look up and saw how it stared at her with piercing yet kind and soft eyes. And then, the king itself bowed _to_ Elsa before returning to his original position and resumed his sleep. Elsa blinked. Just like her, this dragon had _recognized_ her and _acknowledged_ her authority. She was nearly driven to tears by her awe and amazement. How could people have killed so many dragons in the past? How could the world have missed the magnificence of such creatures for hundreds of years?

The dragon rider stood and approached Wintergale. "In the last three years, your Ice Fury and I have learned many things and unlock many mysteries about her species," she said, caressing the dragon's head. "We even had the courage to return to the Fury Mountain and the Bewilderbeast's nest where I first found her to examine the remains of the other Furies. It was something a bit unsettling but quite

enlightening. But believe it or not, Wintergale has done so much more than stay in here and show me all about her. I brought her here to keep her safe, and yet, she has helped me rescue many other dragons. I think she doesn't like to stay away from the actionâ€¦ just like her rider." She turned to look at Elsa from top to bottom. "You're going to need another outfit, something less conspicuous than that."

"What do you mean 'lessâ€¦'?" Elsa began, but her voice trailed off when the rider gave her a knowing look. "Y-you meanâ€¦?" she managed to say, stuttering, before she lost her speech.

"Wintergale is just as stubborn as her rider," the Viking continued, "and she has contributed to the survival of many. Perhaps her rider could do the sameâ€¦" if she's up for it, that is. And while I'm still not entirely sure of this decision, the king has already approved of you, and who am I to go against his will? Now, all I have left to say is, welcome to our sanctuary, Queen Elsa."

Elsa couldn't move, couldn't speak, couldn't as much as blink. She had been preparing for the likely possibility that the rider would give her a negative response, no matter how many arguments she gave her. Was she really letting her stay?

"Well, are you going to stay there all day or what? There's much work to do, and you have lots of things to learn if you're to help us," the rider said, walking away with Cloudjumper by her side.

Elsa finally regained her composure and managed to say, "Thank you, dragon rider."

The rider stopped and lowered her head for a moment before turning around. "Valka," she said. "That's my name. I guess it will be easier for you to call me that."

Elsa blinked. This was the one display of trust she'd been dying to see for a long time, and it answered one of the questions she'd had for the past three years. Valka. She smiled.

"In that case," she replied, "you can lose the royal title and just call me Elsa. It's easier."

The riderâ€¦"Valkaâ€¦" smiled as well, nodding. "Let's get you settled, Elsa. Wintergale made herself a rather cozy lair in a very unexpected part of the sanctuary. Would you like to see it?"

"I would, yes," Elsa replied. Valka climbed onto Cloudjumper's back, and as Elsa did the same with Wintergale and both women took flight again, she added, "What kind of outfit would you consider less conspicuous for me, exactly?"

"Oh, I have a pretty good idea," Valka said.

* * *

><p>Three weeks later*

His footsteps echoed throughout the roofed inner courtyard in the center of the fort, barely muffled only by the low rumbling and growling of dozens of dragons around him. Fortunately, all of the

beasts were asleep. Hunger was usually one of the best ways to discourage even the strongest of dragons, and these ones were famished and weak, kept alive only with enough food to survive day to day.

He inspected the cages to make sure that none of them had been damaged recently by any of the dragons trying to melt them down. Maybe he could afford to lose a few of the ones in the woods nearby—the ones tied up inside the traps to lure other dragons—but not any of the ones in here. These were the ones with the most value to Drago Bludvist, and thus, the ones he'd get the biggest profit from. Gods knew he needed the earnings to buy new ships and build new traps. It was a necessary investment if he wanted to catch even more dragons the next time.

After all, the greatest dragon trapper alive had to keep his reputation.

Then again, the so-called dragon rider who had been rescuing dragons from rival trappers had also contributed to his current status. Eret, Son of Eret, was not only efficient but also cunning and sneaky; the other trappers weren't. Unlike him, who did this just because he knew he had what it took to do it well, their hunger for glory always drove them to do reckless and noticeable things, so it was no wonder that they had been targeted and taken out of the picture while he remained in business.

The funniest thing was, the dragon rider didn't seem to care about actually killing people during his raids. He would just bring a few dragons of his own, use them to free the captured beasts, and be on his way. And yet, the rider's actions always sealed the fate of those unfortunate trappers.

Eret took a hand to his chest. He knew firsthand that if there was something Drago hated, it was incompetent people. The one time he'd showed up empty-handed, Drago had let him walk away with his life only because he knew how good a trapper he was—and even then, he'd made sure to give him a reminder of what would happen if he failed him again. His rivals hadn't been as lucky. Eret himself had been forced to witness the execution of half a dozen of them, and they all had one thing in common besides their trade: they had all been victims of the mysterious dragon rider.

Of course, Eret had one other thing that his rivals didn't: a well-hidden, well-defended fort in the middle of nowhere. The small archipelago he'd chosen to build it on was far away enough from any known Viking tribe and even from the mainland itself. The terrain was not exactly suitable for building, and the soil wasn't good for farming, all of which probably had discouraged other settlers in the past. But for him, it was just perfect, especially because of the sheltered bay.

The fact that dragons weren't usually drawn to this area only spoke more highly of his ability to lure them here. His quota was already filled by now, so all he had to do was to stuff the beasts in the ships he had docked all around the fort in the morning and sail to Drago's camp to present himself before him and receive his payment. Until then, he had to keep making sure that the ones already in cages stayed alive. Dead dragons would be no use for anyone.

He walked out of the courtyard, intent on heading back to the main tower to get some sleep. He expected to feel the warmth of a nice summer night, which wasn't much considering how far to the North they were. Instead, he was greeted by a chilly breeze and a lot of fog which still wasn't enough to block the moonlight that allowed him to see the silhouette of his watchers on the wall and in the towers who were on the lookout for dragons as always.

"Keep your eyes peeled, lads!" he called out, trying not to shiver. "We might earn an extra bonus if we can catch a few more beasts tonight."

There was no response from any of them nor did they move an inch. Eret frowned as he walked up the closest ladder to check up on his men. The fog thinned for a moment when he reached the top of the wooden wall, and then he noticed that what he'd thought to be one of the lookouts was actually an ice figure. The real lookout was on the floor, unconscious. He rushed to the next watcher and found the same thing. What was this?

He felt a sudden uneasiness as he realized that they were not alone. Instinctively, he looked down to where the gate that led to the inner courtyard was and saw a shadow moving through the icy fog towards it.

"Oh, no, you're not," he said to himself, his fear becoming courage in a split-second. He was not gonna let anyone take his dragons.

He slid down the ladder and unsheathed both his swords, charging against the shadowâ€

â€"but then he slipped and fell, his head hitting the ground covered inâ€| ice?!

He looked up to look at the shadow. It was human-looking, but it had horns and tusks in its head and talons in its hands, one of which held a staff with hooks on each end. It matched the description from all the accounts he'd heardâ€"with the only difference being that this staff was seemingly made of ice instead of boneâ€"so he recognized it almost instantly.

This was the dragon rider.

Then, without warning, a bright light began shining behind the intruder and beyond the wallsâ€"an orange light that came with a crackling noise, which could only meanâ€|

"Fire!" he heard someone shout on the other side of the fort. At least some of his men were still awake and conscious. The fire had to be coming from the woods where his traps were set, meaning that the dragons there would either be incinerated or escape. He was leaning towards the latter, as dragon hides were quite fireproof.

He stood and picked his blades from the ground, not willing to lose this fight. The dragon rider swung his staff and tried to deliver a blow, but Eret blocked it by crossing his swords. He expected the ice weapon to shatter, but it didn't, much to his surprise. The rider swung it again and took advantage of Eret's momentary shock to hit his legs, causing him to fall to the floor again.

The fog was starting to clear, and he saw a few of his men arrive at the scene. They tried to take the rider out, but he knocked them all out within seconds. Eret watched the short fight from the floor, amazed at the speed and agility with which he moved, delivering blow after blow and disarming his fighters with absolute ease. Once he was done with them, he opened the gate and walked inside.

Eret saw his chance and decided to seize it. He stood once more, this time leaving his weapons on the floor, and walked as quietly as possible to try and sneak behind the rider. But just when he was mere inches away from him, the rider lifted one of the ends of his staff and hit him directly on the stomach with itâ€”without even looking back. Eret fell a third time, gasping for air. He felt helpless as he saw the rider open every last cage and free his dragons, all of which seemed more than eager to leave once awakened.

Suddenly, the metal roof became covered in frost. Eret heard it creak and crack as it seemed to freeze more and more, until another dragonâ€”a Stormcutterâ€”came crashing down through it, breaking the _metal_ into pieces and providing the freed dragons with a means to escape. Then, Eret blinked as he saw someone else on the Stormcutter's back, reaching out to the only other person in the room. They looked exactly the sameâ€”same outfit, same weaponsâ€”except for the height and the fact that only one of them had a completely blue outfit while the other's had also red details in it.

He was looking not at one but at _two_ dragon riders.

The Stormcutter roared, calling the rescued dragons to follow it as it took flight. While they did, Eret rose and went running back for his swords, still believing that he might be able to finally capture Drago's worst headache. He watched in horror how the rest of the fort was ablaze by now, but he managed to gather courage again and climbed up the ladder. He dodged some of the flames to get to one of the towers that still had a net crossbow large enough to catch the Stormcutter.

But he never got there. For when he felt another cold breeze behind him, he stopped and turned aroundâ€”

â€”just in time to see a true _mountain_ of a dragon emerge from the water.

Eret's survival instincts kicked in when the colossal beast jerked backwards and opened its jaws. He jumped to the water just in time, and from beneath the surface, he managed to see how the large bonfire that his small fortress had become was snuffed out in an instant. Curious as to why this had happened instead of the fire becoming considerably bigger, he resurfaced and grabbed a nearby floating piece of wood. His heart sank when he found that his fort and fleet had been blasted to bits by a gigantic stream of iceâ€”and that a large flock of dragons was flying away from the island, led by the dragon riders standing on the four-winged dragon's back.

It hadn't been more than five minutes, and he'd already lost everything but his lifeâ€”and one boat that had miraculously survived both the fire and the ice. He tried to cheer himself up, telling himself that he only needed that one boat and as many survivors as he could find to carry on. But knowing what would be waiting for him the

next time he saw Drago

He nearly lost the will to live.

* * *

"Dragon trapping is hard enough work as it is without do-gooder dragon riders sneaking in to rescue them."

"What do-gooder?" the young Viking began, until the true meaning of what the trapper had just said suddenly dawned on him. "There are other dragon riders?" he asked, retracting the flaming blade of his sword.

"You mean, other than your two thieving friends from last night? You tell me!"

Two other dragon riders?! Hiccup thought.

* * *

AN: You guys know what this means! We're finally getting there!**

So, yeah, I managed to upload it a few hours earlier than my second deadline because I'm going to church tonight and I wouldn't have been able to upload it otherwise. Thank God I'm finally on a two-week-long vacation, which means I'll have some time to write and update faster... I hope. Of course I still have to clean up my room... But, hey, good news! My mom was gracious enough to lend me her computer's secondary monitor, so I'm putting off the repair of my laptop screen for a while (I admit I didn't have the money to have it repaired anyway, though I was willing to ask for some with a friend). That means there won't be an 'idle weekend' as I had previously announced and that updates will still be regular.

Now, replies to Chapter 14 reviews:

*****_**magiclover13:**_** Yeah, Anna's surprise isn't that much of a surprise for us, is it? I'm glad you like the last chapter and hope you liked this one as well.***** Thanks for your wonderful review!

>*****_**White Hunter:**_** Did you like that reaction?*****

>*****_MysteryGirl7Freak__:_ Hehe, you did get the reference. And don't worry, they will see each other again. Thanks for the review and encouraging words!

>*****_**_ArmyWife22079_**:_ We're talking Disney's Eric here, right? I guess it would be a really interesting theory, yes. Was your child a boy or a girl?*

>*****_GraceSophia:_ I guess it was Thursday morning in the end. I hope the extra day of waiting wasn't that bad for you. Thank you for reviewing!

>*****_Angryhenry:_ He just made a cameo and will be introduced formally in the next chapter.

>*****_**PascalDragon:**_** Well guessed. Now all that remains is to see Elsa's reaction when she returns and sees a very pregnant Anna! And I'll think you'll like what I have in mine to blend both stories. ** Thanks for your review, Sven!

>*****_Bteam:_ Hahaha, LOL!

>*****_Crystal12:_ Oh, yeah, she will be even more awesome. Thank you for reviewing!

>*****_*****_**Pabulover123**_*****:**_** Don't worry, you were still in time. And yep, it could. *****Thanks for the review!_>WEast: It was a good move, trust me. Thanks for the review!

>*****_dimkaxoxo:_ Thank you! I will!*****

>*****

*****Next think on my updates calendar is a new chapter for 'Winter Love' which will hopefully be ready in a couple of days. Expect an update for 'Ice Fury' soon!*****

*****Don't forget to review on your way out!*****

*****P.S.: Continuing with more references, did anyone catch the one to _Game of Thrones_? (Hint: it's related to Kit Harrington, a.k.a. 'Eret, Son of Eret'.)*****

16. The Rider's Son

A/N: I'm so, **_so, _****_SO_****_ SORRY!_ I know I've been away for a long time, and I apologize for the delay. I had a serious case of writer's block these past few weeks, combined with my coming back to schoolâ€”and everything that it entailsâ€”and a few translation jobs I had to tend to. But I'm back now, and I hope the wait is well worth it.**

I feel the need to remind you that we're finally getting into the storyline of HTTYD2, so, if any of you still hasn't watched the movie for any reason and wants to avoid spoilers, I recommend you wait a bit longer before reading this chapter. Otherwise, if you don't mind said spoilers or if you've already watched the film, enjoy!

* * *

><p>"You do realize that's only going to whet their appetite, don't you?" Valka said as Elsa and Wintergale shared out fish among the dragons they'd freed the night before.<p>

"Have you seen them?" was Elsa's calm yet firm response. "They barely managed to fly away from that fort. They're hungry and weak, and there's not enough fish in the area for the Alpha to feed them. You should be grateful Wintergale and I brought all this fish."

"And I am," the Viking said. "But still, just two fish for each dragon?"

Elsa didn't reply. There were too many rescued dragons and not enough fish in Wintergale's saddlebags to feed them all, so rationing the food was the only choice, and yet it was better than forcing them to fly to the sanctuary and risk losing them to weakness by starvation than this. She took two fish and gently left them on the ground in front of a Monstrous Nightmare. Then, caressing its head, she told it with a soothing voice, "Don't worry. You'll be able to eat more than this very soon. Just hang in there, okay?"

The Monstrous Nightmare growled softly in response to her voice and touch. Valka smiled.

"If anyone had told me that a queen from a faraway land without any knowledge about dragons would turn out to be such a natural dragon charmer, I wouldn't have believed it," she said.

"I had a good teacher," Elsa replied, shrugging.

"No, that has nothing to do with it. I only taught you what I know. You, however, have a way with the dragons that cannot be learned. I told you once that you, just like I, had the soul of a dragon, and I still believe that."

Elsa wished she could dismiss the comment in a humbly manner so as not to seem arrogant, but she couldn't argue. Even she was surprised of how quickly she'd gotten used to living among dragons—and of how the dragons had also grown fond of her presence. He'd learned the name and classification of every species in the sanctuary in less than three days, as well as their specific characteristics and abilities.

Deadly Nadders, for example, were Sharp-class dragons easily recognized by their bright vivid colors and the spikes covering them from head to tail. They had the hottest fire of all dragon species—enough to melt metal with ease—but they mostly preferred to use their venomous tail spikes to fight, as they could shoot them with great accuracy. They also had a great sense of smell, making them excellent trackers—which was something Valka had discovered on her own, as it was something that Bork had never learned.

Such discovery had been the key to finding the trappers' fort. Elsa was still amazed at how well Valka's plan to allow some of her dragons to be captured had worked. Valka had never had the need to do such a thing with any of the other trappers she'd taken on, but the one from last night had turned out to be quite sneaky. Desperate times, desperate measures. Fortunately, Valka's Nadders had found those dragons not long after their capture.

Then there was the way in which Valka had coordinated the strike—or rather, how she'd instructed Cloudjumper and Wintergale to lead the other dragons into battle. After dropping Elsa inside the fort under cover of the fog she'd conjured, the Ice Fury had taken most of the dragons Valka had brought with her, and while she couldn't breathe fire like them, she certainly knew how to set things on fire by commanding 'her' dragons to set the traps in the woods ablaze to burn down the ropes holding the dragons prisoners. Meanwhile, Valka and Cloudjumper had taken a few select dragons and set fire to the fort itself while Elsa opened the cages inside and froze the metal ceiling enough to break it. It had been brilliant.

Elsa turned to look how Wintergale softly 'talked' to another one of the rescued dragons. She didn't cease to be amazed at how other dragons obeyed and followed her, not even after Valka had told her of how she'd earned that respect and authority.

During her first year in the sanctuary, Wintergale had apparently warmed to the idea of helping Valka and Cloudjumper rescue other dragons, but the rider wouldn't even let her out, what with her being the last living Ice Fury and all. She wasn't easily deterred, though, and one day she decided to sneak out of the sanctuary to follow her on one of her rescue missions.

Her defiance of Valka's orders had saved the lives of both the rider and of his dragon.

The Ice Fury had followed the rider to a small island where she'd found an injured Cloudjumper and a desperate Valka trying to help him escape from the trap he'd fallen into. The Stormcutter was quite skillful when it came to disabling them, but after opening a faulty one to rescue a Hideous Zippleback, it had closed itself again on him, breaking both of his upper wings. Most of the other dragons they'd already rescued that day had fled, and only a few of them remained along with the ones the Viking had brought with her for that rescue mission—all of them in disarray without their leader. Worse, the trappers who had set those traps in that island were on their way back to capture the rescuers, and by the time Wintergale had arrived, they were nearly there.

It wasn't easy for Wintergale, but after a short while she somehow had managed to take command of Valka's dragons and lead them against the trappers, without a single one of the dragons falling into their hands, until Valka finally freed Cloudjumper. The stubborn Stormcutter was able to fly using his lower wings to support the upper ones—whereas he usually used the upper ones to hide the lower ones—and made it back to the sanctuary, along with Valka and all the other dragons. Upon their return, however, Valka wouldn't let him out until his wings healed. Thus, the Viking had been forced to find another dragon to ride on.

Needless to say, she was mad at Wintergale for disobeying her orders, but she couldn't deny that the Ice Fury had proven her worth. In the end, she finally decided to give the white dragon a chance, and for nearly a year, Wintergale was Valka's companion. Together, they rescued as many dragons as Cloudjumper and Valka would've in the same amount of time, not to mention that it was during this time that they ventured back together to both the Fury Mountain and the dead Bewilderbeast's lair, learning all there was to learn about Furies.

It also turned out that all of the dragons that Wintergale had saved began looking up to her as well as to the Bewilderbeast, and such respect soon spread to the rest of the sanctuary dwellers. This sparked a sort of friendly rivalry between her and Cloudjumper—whose pride, confidence, and large size had lead him to think of himself long ago as the top dragon in Valka's mountain fortress, second only to the king of all dragons in the nest. Once he had recovered and both dragons joined Valka in her rescue missions, the Ice Fury and the Stormcutter would often compete to prove which of them could save more dragons.

Valka couldn't complain about it, since their little competition made rescuing dragons all the more quick and efficient, and also because she knew that there was no actual grudge between them. If anything, it was obvious to her that Cloudjumper held Wintergale in high esteem. After all, had it not been for her intervention the day he fell into that trap, heâ€”and probably Valka and the rest of her dragonsâ€”would've died. They were all in her debt, and she had their gratitude forever.

In any case, Wintergale definitely knew how to be a leader. She earned the respect and loyalty of other dragons by also looking after them. One had only to watch her giving away fish among all the rescued dragons right now. She had an almost regal bearing when she walked but looked at them with compassionate eyes. Elsa had noticed this behavior from her first day in the sanctuary. She had wondered, though, why Wintergale didn't as much as smile whenever there were other dragons nearby, until Valka had told her that story. Then she knew in her heart and understood that the Ice Fury was trying to keep up the appearance of a stoic leaderâ€”or a queen.

"Oh, but don't let her pull the wool over your eyes," Valka had told her. "She may act like that in public, but when it's just the two of us, she always lets herself be coddled."

Valka kept saying that Wintergale had learned how to behave like a queen from her rider, but Elsa also believed that growing up with a Bewilderbeast had influenced her as well. Still, she tried not to dismiss the Viking's comments and even tried to remember when the Ice Fury could've seen her act like that. The only occasion she could think of in which they had both been together with other people before Sigurd's assault to the Ice Palace was the night when she took her there after she'd helped her fly again. Anna and Kristoff had been waiting for her at the Palace. Other than that night in which Elsa regained her regal attitude only for a few minutes while talking to Anna, she couldn't come up with any otherâ€”

A soft gurgling that quickly became a restless growling caught Elsa's attention and interrupted her train of thought. Cloudjumper had woken up and was looking at the horizon, his double spiked crest shaking violently. Valka noticed it as well and assumed the same stance as her dragon.

"What is it?" Elsa asked, joining them.

"Dragon trappers," Valka replied, pointing her finger at a small dot on the ocean in the distance.

Elsa didn't doubt the Viking's words nor the Stormcutter's warning, but she still wanted to have a better look, so she made an ice spyglass and pointed it at the dot. There it wasâ€”a small boat with two blue sails at the front and several net crossbows of considerable size much like the ones she'd seen in the trapper's fort the previous night. In fact, she recognized the ship as one of the many vessels docked around said fort.

"That guy doesn't know when to give up, does he?" Elsa said, putting the spyglass aside and looking at Valka. The Viking was grinning as she stared at the ice object.

"You can create anything you want out of ice, eh?" she said.

Elsa shrugged. "Do you want to have a look?" she asked, offering her the spyglass.

"Sure, why not?" Valka replied, accepting it. She aimed it at the trappers' ship and added, "You're right. He doesn't know when enough is enough."

"So, what do you want to do?"

Valka seemed to mull it over for a moment as she stared at the ship through the spyglass. When she lowered it, she said, "They're coming this way. We must remain concealed. Can you do something about it?"

Without hesitation, Elsa summoned a thick fog that slowly rose and surrounded the tall precipitous island they were resting in. "There. That should give us enough respite to get the dragons ready to leave at dusk. Under cover of night, we should be able toâ€"

"No," Valka said. "You need to leave right now. The Alpha and Wintergale are more than capable of leading the dragons we rescued back to the sanctuary. I need you to go with them."

"And what about you?" Elsa asked, frowning. "Are you planning to take them on your own?"

"What, are you upset you won't get to have all the fun?"

"What if I am?"

Valka chuckled. "Are you sure you're a queen? Because you don't act like one."

"Not here at the end of the world, I'm not. I'm a warrior and a dragon rider, just like you."

Valka shook her head, still grinning. "Don't worry about me. Cloudjumper and I can stay here along with the dragons I brought, and we won't even attack those trappers. There's no need for them to know that we're here. We'll just keep our distance and make sure that they don't head towards the sanctuaryâ€"and only if needed be, we'llâ€| discourage them a bit."

Elsa nodded her understanding, and while Valka climbed on Cloudjumper's back to fly to the other side of the island where the Alpha was resting, she and Wintergale began gathering the rescued dragons. By the time Valka returned, they were all ready to go.

"The fog will remain like this all night long, just in case," Elsa told her. "You want to keep the spyglass?"

"No' I'm good," Valka reassured her. "Thank you. I'll see you soon."

Elsa smiled in acknowledgement. She climbed on her dragon's saddle and gave her a gentle nudge, encouraging her to take flight. Soon, she and the dragons they'd rescued were heading to the North. By Elsa's reckoning, now that the dragons were somewhat fed and had

regained some strength, they would be there in less than six hours, so she'd have a chance to rest soon enough.

She grinned. Wintergale had indeed chosen the most unexpected place to build her home within her home—one of the ice-covered rock pillars supporting the ceiling of the sanctuary. The Ice Fury had originally added some ice of her own to it, giving her rather small lair the appearance of a small protrusion in the massive column. Since Elsa's arrival, however, it had grown to look more like the room she'd built for her dragon beneath her Ice Palace. It was a good thing that she'd found a way to expand their little home _inwards_ without compromising the integrity of the pillar. It wasn't lavishly decorated, but the small bed she'd made was more than enough for her, and it was all she could think of. It wouldn't be long before she could get some sleep. It wouldn't be long—

* * *

><p>Elsa! Wake up, wake up, wake up!

"Anna, go back to sleep," Elsa replied, not willing to wake up like her sister was asking her to. Then she remembered. She was in Valka's sanctuary. Anna was still in Arendelle. So, who was trying to wake her up?

She opened her eyes. It wasn't Anna but Valka. Her voice probably had evoked little Anna's as her mind tried to process it. "Valka? What is it?" she asked sleepily.

"My son, Hiccup!" the Viking replied. She seemed pretty excited.

"What's with him?" Elsa insisted, still half-asleep and not fully paying attention.

"I found him!"

"Oh, that's wonderful, Valka. Congratulations," Elsa said, nearly falling asleep again. Then, as she understood what Valka had said, her eyes popped open. "You _what_?!"

"I found my son!" Valka said, laughing. "And he's a dragon rider, like me!"

Elsa sat on her bed, rubbing her eyes in an attempt to get rid of the sleepiness. "Wait, hold on a second. Your son is a _dragon rider_? Didn't you tell me that your village was at war with the dragons?"

Valka nodded, still smiling. "And yet, he's riding a—" She gasped and looked at Wintergale. "Oh, my. He's riding a Night Fury. A _Night Fury_! Do you know what that means for Wintergale?"

Elsa lost her breath. She took both hands to her lips. Of course she knew what it meant, but she also saw the bigger picture. Perhaps Valka had just found a companion for Elsa's Ice Fury, but no matter how much she cared about the species and wanted to see her lifelong dream come true, she couldn't hide the emotion that came with the fact that she'd also found her son which he had been separated from shortly after his birth. She was still a mother, and surely after 20

years of being away from him, that encounter had to be more important than anything else. Thus, she had to make sure that the Viking didn't lose focus.

"We'll think of that later," she told her. "If you just found your son, why aren't you with him?"

"I wanted to tell you the news, and I thought that since he's here, you might want to meet himâ€”and his dragon, of course."

Elsa wondered if she'd heard wrong. "_Here?_ As in, here at the sanctuary?"

"Yes! Isn't it amazing?" Valka replied, running back to the small entrance to Wintergale's lair where Cloudjumper was waiting for her, latched on to the ice. And before Elsa could ask anything else, she hopped onto the Stormcutter's back and had him fly her away, circling around the pillar and heading to the opposite side. Not wanting to miss the reunion, Elsa hurried to the end of the room and thinned a small rectangular section of the wall, turning it into a crystal-clear window. She spotted Cloudjumper and followed him with her eyes until the four-winged dragon reached a small outcropping of rock above a cliff where he latched on again to one of the largest stalactites.

Then she saw _him_â€”the rider's son.

He was just a few meters away from Valka and Cloudjumper, walking towards the edge of the cliff and staring at the thousands of dragons flying all around the massive ice cave. And true enough, a dragon was walking beside himâ€”a dragon that even from a distance clearly resembled Wintergale, except that this one was black in color and had a black, red, and white tail. Noâ€”actually, only half of its tail looked red and white; the other half was as black as the rest of its skin. Elsa was confused. Had the young Viking painted his dragon's tail or something?

Her curiosity became too much to ignore. She made again her ice spyglass and aimed it towards the cliff to have a better look of the rider's son. He was a slim young man with somewhat scraggy and unkempt brown hair. Much like Valka, he didn't seem like the Vikings of history books, making Elsa wonder whether all Vikings in this time period had a similar build. He had a leatherâ€”_outfit_, for lack of a better description, as it was part armor, part suit of some kind. He had some sort of prosthetic left foot, but it was unlike anything Elsa had ever seen. Not that she'd actually seen a prosthesis in real life, but she had read about them in medicine books she'd found in her father's library.

As for the Night Fury, well, there wasn't much to say. Aside from his skin color, the only other noticeable difference was its eye color; he had green eyes, whereas Wintergale had blue eyes. That was only considering _natural_ differences between both dragons, though, for there was one other thing that made him different from her Ice Fury: his tail fin. What Elsa had thought was a left fin painted red was in reality an _artificial_ fin. He was crippled, just like his rider. Elsa wondered if they both had had some sort of accident while flying or something.

The young Viking seemed too mesmerized to notice that his mother and

her Stormcutter were hanging from the ceiling right above his head. His Night Fury, though, apparently sensed the presence of both rider and dragon because he looked up and to his right. Only then did the young rider do the same thing. The look on his face was one of utter shock, which made Elsa wonder if mother and son had already had enough time to talk before his arrival here. She didn't believe her curiosity could grow any bigger, but it did; she felt a desperate need to eavesdrop on them and hear what Valka's son had to say.

Fortunately, she had a way to do so without leaving her current position.

Without diverting her gaze, she focused her mind on the ice below her feet and on how it extended upwards and connected with the rest of the spiky shell that protected the sanctuary. Just like it became her eyes when she trained, the ice became her ears, immediately allowing her to sense in her mind the thousand sounds that bounced off it—dragon roars, water falling on the lake, and the distant voice of a young man saying, "This is where you've been for 20 years?"

Through the spyglass, she saw that Valka nodded at her son in reply, smiling widely. Elsa focused her mind exclusively on his voice, blocking out everything else.

"You-you've been rescuing them," she heard the echo of the young rider's words. Again, Elsa saw when Valka nodded, and then she heard something like, "Unbelievable—" He was too far away from the ice to hear him more clearly, so she commanded a few ice streams to extend from the ceiling down the moss-covered rock walls, towards the Viking's position.

"You're not upset?" she heard Valka's voice loudly and clearly. Elsa grinned, grateful for her powers and their usefulness.

"What? No, I—" "I don't know," the young Viking replied, stuttering. "It-it's a bit much to get my head around, to be frank. It's not every day you find out your mother is some kind of crazy—feral—vigilante dragon lady." He sounded sincere, and Elsa couldn't perceive any resentfulness in his words, so he didn't hold any grudges at least. That should make reconnecting with his mother all the more easy, something Elsa was glad for. She wished to see her friend Valka happy.

"Oh, well," Valka chuckled as Cloudjumper helped her off his back and down to the floor. "At least I'm not boring, right?"

One of the dragons nearby approached her son and sniffed him curiously. He put a hand on its head and replied, "No, I suppose there is that—specific thing."

"Do—do you like it?" Valka asked, hesitantly.

"I—I—I don't have the words," her son replied, looking again around him.

Elsa struggled to remember the young Viking's name. She'd still been a bit sleepy when Valka mentioned it, but it was kind of catchy. She also remembered that it began with 'H'. What was it?

A few dragons approached the Night Fury, and one of them even had the audacity to force its snout beneath the black dragon's tail to give it a sniff. Needless to say, the victim of said audacity jumped, his eyes wide open in fright, before snarling at all the dragons around him. Elsa chuckled again while listening to Valka asking his son for permission to approach his dragon and looking at her as she did so.

"Oh, he's beautiful," the Viking woman said, caressing it. The Night Fury smiled and crawled playfully around her. "I've never seen a Night Fury this close. And he might very well be the last of his kind. And look, he's your age! No wonder you get along so well."

There was a look of wonder in the boy's eyes which only grew when his mother mentioned that small detail about his dragon's age. Elsa diverted her gaze for a moment and looked at a sleeping Wintergale lying not six feet away from her. Valka had not only told her that the white dragon was about 24 in dragon years—which were approximately the same as human years—but also how to determine said age based on some specific traits. She didn't doubt her knowledge for a second, so, if Valka said that her son's dragon was 20 years old, then that was his age—which meant he was younger than Wintergale. She wondered if that would be okay with the Ice Fury.

"And retractable teeth!" she heard the Viking woman's voice again. "Incredible."

Elsa frowned. What was so surprising about the Night Fury's retractable teeth? Unless—

"You have shown her your toothless smile, haven't you, Wintergale?" she wondered out loud, staring once more at her dragon. She already knew that she no longer behaved like a puppy, but had she really changed so much after their parting that she hadn't smiled in three years?

"I found him in the woods," the rider's son replied to a question Valka had begun to pose and which Elsa had vaguely heard but not paid attention to. "He was shot down and wounded."

Her angle didn't allow to see Valka's first reaction to this revelation, but when the Viking turned around and stood, Elsa saw sadness and anger mixed together in one single expression. The why of it seemingly became as obvious to Valka's son as it was to Elsa when she showed him three of the crippled dragons she'd rescued from Drago's traps. What Elsa couldn't understand was why he seemed to grow more and more uneasy while his mother spoke.

"And what of this?" Valka asked, sounding upset. "Did Drago or his trappers do this to?"

The boy now had his back turned to Elsa. She couldn't see his face anymore, but his body language spoke volumes. "Oh, yeah," he said, utter nervousness etched in his voice. "Well, crazy thing is—I'm actually the one who shot him down."

Both Elsa and Valka frowned when they heard this. He was

responsible for the Night Fury's injury, and yet the black dragon was with him?

"Hey, it's okay, though," the young Viking continued. "He got me back. Right, bud? You couldn't save all of me, could you? You just had to make it even! So, peg leg!"

He showed her mom his prosthetic foot as he said this final sentence. His dragon then slipped his head beneath the boy's legs and gently thrust him into the air, and the boy landed on the Night Fury's back. They seemed to share a strong bond. Then it dawned on Elsa that both rider and dragon were missing a part of their bodies exactly on the same side—the left one. She tilted her head. _So, they have something in common physically speaking._

"And—| what did your father think about your Night Fury friend?" Valka asked, apparently moving past the topic of the Night Fury's missing tail fin.

"Uh, he didn't take it all that well," her son replied, and Valka hummed ironically. "But then, he changed. They all did. Pretty soon, everyone back home had dragons of their own."

Valka, who was now the one with her back to Elsa, had lifted her head as soon as she'd heard about her husband's change of heart. Elsa imagined that she'd be more than glad to learn of this, but the Viking's reply was entirely different from what she had expected. "If only it were possible."

"No, really—" her son began, but she interrupted him.

"Believe me, I tried as well, but people are not capable of change, Hiccup."

Hiccup! That was the name Elsa had been trying to remember. She chuckled in spite of herself; it was catchy. She'd have to ask Valka about it later. For now, she tried to understand why the Viking would say something like that. If there was any living proof that people _were_ capable of change, it was Elsa. Not five years ago, she still was a fearful girl who couldn't control her powers. Now, she was a strong and confident woman who could do the most amazing things with her abilities—and Valka knew it. She'd seen it with her own eyes. Why, then, was it so difficult for the Viking to believe that the people she had once called her own had changed?

"Some of us were just born different," Valka added, turning to look at Cloudjumper. Elsa remembered those words. The rider had spoken that very same phrase three years ago, just before telling Elsa her story. She guessed that she was about to tell his son the very same account.

And no sooner said than done, the rider recounted how she had been taken from her village 20 years before to her son. Unlike the first time Elsa had heard it, though, now there was more than a simple trace of regret in Valka's voice as she reached the last part of the story. In fact, this time it was _heavy_ with regret. And even then, Hiccup didn't seem disappointed or resentful but quite understanding of his mother's situation.

"You and your father nearly died that night," Valka concluded, "all

because I couldn't kill a dragon."

Hiccup smiled softly, and Elsa could see relief in his eyes, as if a burden had been taken off his shoulders. "Heh, it runs in the family," he muttered.

"It broke my heart to stay away, but I believed you'd be safer if I did," Valka said, and once again, Hiccup didn't seem to blame her for not returning home all those years ago.

"How did you survive?" he asked his mother.

"Oh, Cloudjumper never meant to harm me," the Viking woman replied, sounding more calm and even excited. She walked towards the edge of the cliff, followed by her son and their respective dragons. "He must've thought I belonged hereâ€¦ in the home of the great Bewilderbeast," she added, gesturing with her eye at the king of all dragons. "The Alpha species. One of the very few that still exist."

Elsa felt a gentle nudge to her right that made her lose focus. She knew who it was, but she nevertheless lowered the spyglass to look at the white dragon. "Hey, Wintergale. Sleep well?"

The white dragon yawned and gave her a soft growl in response.

"That's great. Now, why don't you come here and see who Valka has brought this time?"

Wintergale complied and walked up to the window slowly. Elsa knew that the Ice Fury didn't need a spyglass like she did, since most dragons had a keen and powerful eyesight. So, she wasn't surprised when Wintergale blinked a couple of times after peeking through the window.

"No, your eyes are not deceiving you, my dear friend," Elsa reassured her. "That is a Night Fury."

The white dragon blinked again before smiling excitedly and wagging its tail. Obviously, she understood what this meant. Elsa giggled as she focused her mind again on the Vikings' voices. Valka and Hiccup had reached the outcropping overlooking the Bewilderbeast's resting place, and she was just introducing him to the graceful giant, as she liked to call him. She knelt in front of him, and so did Cloudjumper and even the Night Fury, but Hiccup just stood there with a look of absolute astonishment in his face. Then, the gigantic creature blew some snow into him, and Valka laughed.

"He likes you," she told her son as he shook the snow off his hair. Then, walking behind him, she added, "You must be hungry."

"Uh, yeah, I could eat," Hiccup replied.

"Good. It's feeding time," Valka said, taking Hiccup by the hand and guiding him away from the waterfall.

Elsa lowered the spyglass, a smile drawn across her face. She was so glad for Valka and hoped that the rider's happiness wouldn't be taken away. She considered it better to stay in the sanctuary while both

Vikings went out with the dragons so that they could have the time together they deserved. She and Wintergale would get their own chance to meet both the rider's son and his dragon in due time. But just as she was about to sever her mental link with the ice, she heard Valka's voice again saying, "Before we go, there's someone I'd like you to meet."

She shot a double take with the naked eye in the direction of the two riders, and then she looked again through the spyglass to find that the younger Viking was also staring at his mother. "Someone? You mean, as in another one of your dragons, orâ€|?" he began asking, but Valka shook her head in response to her son's question. "You've also got _people_ living here?"

"Just the one person," Valka replied. "She found a very rare dragon I was trying to rescue and bonded with it, and then I met her. She's been my friend ever since, and she's also been my traveling companion for some time now."

"Really? So, she's a dragon rider?" Valka nodded. "And she trained her dragon all by herself?"

"Well, it wasn't training as much as it was developing a close relationship with it. They're friends and soul mates, just like Cloudjumper and me."

"Okayâ€| where is she, then?"

"Oh, she'll join us shortly if she's listening to me right nowâ€"which I'm certain she is, aren't you, Elsa?"

Elsa recoiled. Valka had glanced briefly at her pillar as she said those words, almost staring into her eyes. The rider knewâ€|? She shook her head. Of course she knew; Elsa had told her about her ability to see and listen through ice, and she also knew that she was too curious to let a reencounter like this pass without her being witness of it.

Well, she'd just been invited to meet Hiccup. Might as well do it, especially if his presence here meant she'd be seeing more of him on a regular basis.

She undid the spyglass and turned her ice gown into her rider outfitâ€"not the one that looked like Valka's but the one she'd been wearing when she departed from Arendelleâ€"before heading to the entrance of the small lair where Wintergale was already waiting for her.

"Alright, then. Ready to meet the last known Night Fury alive, girl?" she asked the white dragon.

The Ice Fury nodded, smiling, but still trying to remain calm instead of getting overly excited about it. Elsa chuckled and climbed onto the Ice Fury's back, and they flew down together to where the two riders and their dragons were. Both Valka and Hiccup had already gotten on the back of their respective dragons, Hiccup and his Night Fury being to Valka's right.

Without making any noise, Elsa and Wintergale landed right beside the younger Viking. Mother and son were still talking, but when Valka saw

them, she left her sentence half done and addressed her directly. "Ah, you were eavesdropping, after all!" she said.

"I'm sorry about that," Elsa replied with an apologetic smile. "I couldn't help myself."

"Oh, that's fine. Don't worry," Valka shrugged it off. "I want you to meet my son, Hiccup, and his Night Fury, Toothless. Son, these are Elsa and Wintergale."

Toothless?!_ Elsa thought. Had this boy really given his dragon a supposedly mighty Night Fury such a ridiculous name? She could almost hear Anna's voice in her head, saying, 'What did you tell me once about dragons having strong names?' But then it occurred to her that maybe Hiccup had named his dragon like that because of his toothless smile, and all of a sudden, the name didn't sound that ridiculous. It was still funny though.

Hiccup had diverted his gaze from his mother to Elsa then to Wintergale, and his eyes had been darting back and forth between her and Valka after her introduction, as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Elsa chuckled and extended her hand to him. "Pleased to meet you, Hiccup," she said.

The young Viking didn't shake her hand, didn't speak, didn't as much as flinch. His wide-open eyes were fixed on her dragon, his mouth agape. His Night Fury had the very same expression in his face. Finally, after a few awkward moments of silence, he said, almost breathlessly, "Youâ€¦ that'sâ€¦ y-you have a white Night Fury?"

Elsa was about to reply, but Valka beat her to it. "Oh, she's a Fury alright, but not a Night_ Fury," she said. "She's an Ice_ Fury."

* * *

><p>AN: Please forgive me if there were any typos or grammar mistakes in this chapter. I just barely finished writing it a couple of hours ago and still haven't translated it (which, as some of you may already know, also serves as proofreading for me). In fact, for those of you who also read the ****Spanish version, ****I'm afraid I won't be ready to update it until Tuesday. Sorry.
>

****Now, as for the chapter itself, I want to make a few remarks. Without going into details, in the movie, I felt it like there were certain issues concerning timeâ€¦"and by time I mean the moment of day or night in which some events seemed to happen. So, I decided to simply follow the most logical timeframe and place the reunion between Valka and Hiccup in the same day as the one in which Hiccup finds Eret sailing to Drago's camp, albeit with a difference of only a few hours.****

****To be honest, though, that little detail is ultimately insignificant. The most important thing I really want to mention is that DreamWorks seemed to overlook the fact that Valka had acquired her knowledge of Furies from somewhere. If you had a chance of watching one of the many featurettes that were released before the movie itselfâ€¦the one titled "He's Beautiful"â€¦you'll notice that Valka explicitly says that she'd never seen a Night Fury from up close, and yet, later on in the film, she unlocks Toothless' double**

fins. The producers probably thought they could get around this issue by simply editing Valka's lines and deleting her statement about her and Night Furies, but if you compare the featurette and the film and look closely, you'll notice that her lips are still synced with the original lines.**

Why am I mentioning this? Well, it's simply because it kept bugging me, even before the film was released, that Valka could know so much about Night Furies and yet there were none at her sanctuary. So, where indeed did she acquire that knowledge? And that was one of many factors that inspired me to write this story (and kudos for those of you who noticed it way before this update and have mentioned it on your reviews). Now, I'm the kind of guy who believes that multiple universes might actually coexist within a single one, and that's the case with Frozen and HTTYD2. I think the events that took place up until Chapter 12 might still have happened within the universe of HTTYD and that it was through Wintergale that Valka learned so much about Furies in general.

Now, let's talk about AUs. I believe it might be possible that, within the pre-established canon of HTTYD, Elsa did follow Valka's orders to take care of Wintergale and didn't leave Arendelle, which is the reason why neither of them were present during the events of HTTYD2. Thus, you could say that this is the story of what would've happened if Elsa did the opposite. Ripple effect, my friendsâ€”the smallest details can change so many things.

Yeah, I'm a bit delusional. But, hey, this could make for a pretty good headcanon, don't you think?

I'm uploading this chapter at approximately 12:30 local time, and I've got school tomorrow, so you'll have to excuse me if, at the moment, I don't add any replies to the reviews for Chapter 15 (which, by the way, total 29 so far; thank you so much for your continued support!). But don't worry, I'll get to it the minute I return from school tomorrow. I'll also re-upload this chapter after I finish translating/proofreading it so that there are no typos or even inconsistencies left.

I'll do my best to upload Chapter 17 ASAP, but no promises. Still, rest assured that I'm still around and that this story is still continuing. Until the next time, and don't forget to review on your way out!

P.S.: Season 4 of OUaT finally premiered just a few hours ago! Who was able to watch the first episode, and what were your thoughts about it? Please, feel free to share your opinion in your review.

* * *

><p>EDIT: Whooops! Apparently I forgot to remove one of my personal notes in one of the last paragraphs, but I've already fixed it. Now you see what I mean when I say that translating it to Spanish also serves as proofreading for me? Anyway, I'll focus on the translation for now so I can upload it tomorrow, so you'll have to wait another day before I post my replies to your previous reviews. See you tomorrow

17. Flying with the Vikings

"Before we go, there's someone I'd like you to meet."

Hiccup looked at his mom, frowning. "Someone? You mean, as in another one of your dragons, orâ€¦?" She shook her head before he could finish the question. "You've also got people living here?"

"Just the one person," Valka replied. "She found a very rare dragon I was trying to rescue, and they bonded; then I met her. She's been my friend ever since, and she's also been my traveling companion for some time now."

"Really?" Hiccup said. He recalled Eret's comment about two riders attacking his fort. Of course, after learning that one of them was his mother, everything else seemed to lose importance for a while. In fact, his mind was still reeling after all he had seen and heard in the past hour alone, but now he was curious again. "So, she's a dragon rider?" His mom nodded. "And she trained her dragon all by herself?"

"Well, it wasn't training as much as it was developing a close relationship with it. They're friends and soul mates, just like Cloudjumper and me."

Hiccup nodded slowly in understanding. He knew what that was like; everyone in Berk, including him, preferred the term 'training' because it was short and easy, but what he and his friends did at the Dragon Academy went beyond simply training them. His mom's way of putting it into words nailed it perfectly.

Now he was intrigued, though. He'd believed himself unique for five years, what with him being the first Viking ever to train a dragonâ€”and a Night Fury, no less. Learning that his mother had done the same thing fifteen years before him, even if it hadn't been with the same kind of dragon, was a pleasant surprise. But to hear that other people elsewhere could achieve such a featâ€¦ well, to be honest, he had mixed feelings about it. It was heartening, yes, but it also made him question his so-called uniqueness. In any case, he wanted to know how his mom's companion had done it. "Okayâ€¦ where is she, then?"

"Oh, she'll join us shortly if she's listening to me right nowâ€”which I'm certain she is, aren't you, Elsa?" Valka said, looking everywhere around them as if searching for someone.

Hiccup raised an eyebrow and imitated his mother, looking to his left and right and behind him. "Um, h-how could she be listening to you? Is she close by?"

"You could say that, yes," Valka replied with a grin.

Toothless and Cloudjumper chose that moment to rejoin them. Valka and Cloudjumper approached the cliff edge, and she climbed on her dragon's back. Hiccup was amazed by the way in which his mom could stand up while flying and not fall. Then again, she had both several more years of experience than him and a much larger dragon.

"Soâ€¦ where did you meet this friend of yours?" he asked, climbing

on Toothless' back as well.

"Not anywhere near Berk, if that's what you're asking," Valka replied. When Hiccup frowned again, she added, "She'd from a faraway land which you would know nothing about. I didn't know about it when I journeyed there in search of that dragon."

"What kind of dragon are we talking about, anyway?" Hiccup said, trying to remember the names of all dragon species classified as 'Rare' in the Book of Dragons. "A Flightmare? A Hotburple? A Skrill?"

His mom chuckled. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"I'm serious. You'll need to see it with your ownâ€" Valka began but stopped talking in midsentence. Then she looked past him and exclaimed, "Ah, you were eavesdropping, after all!"

"I'm sorry about that," a female voice said beside him. He turned to his right and found himself staring into the eyes of a young blonde womanâ€| but his focus quickly shifted from her to her dragon. He blinked and shook his head in disbelief of what he was seeing. His heart skipped a bit, and he lost conscience of everything around himâ€"including his mother's voiceâ€"as he reminisced of what he'd told Toothless just the day before.

Who knows? Maybe we'll finally track down another Night Fury. Wouldn't that be something?

This was a dream come true for him as much as it probably was for Toothless as well, and under any other circumstances, he would've been absolutely excited about it. Today, however, this discovery only added up to the load of surprises he'd been receiving in such a short amount of time. He became a mess of thoughts and emotions, and it took him a while to snap out of it.

"Youâ€| that'sâ€| y-you have a white Night Fury?" Those were the only words he was able to articulate.

The blonde opened her mouth to speak, but Valka beat her to it. "Oh, she's a Fury alright, but not a Night Fury," she said. "She's an Ice Fury."

Hiccup couldn't take his eyes away from the white dragon. "Ice Fury?"

"Long story short, she breaths ice instead of fire, like the Bewilderbeast. Elsa," Valka addressed the younger female, "I assume you already know where we're going. Will you come with us?"

The blonde riderâ€"Elsaâ€"hesitated. She looked at Hiccup then at his mother before smiling softly and saying, "Sure, why not?"

"Then let's go. Hiccup, don't fall behind," Valka instructed him.

Before Hiccup could as much as wink, both women took off, heading towards an opening in the ice ceiling. It took him a few moments to

react again, and only then did he notice Toothless was staring at the distance—namely at the opening—with dreamy eyes. It was almost enough to make the young Viking chuckle. Almost.

"Come on, bud," said, encouraging the Night Fury to follow them. Toothless shook his head and glanced briefly at Hiccup, smiling widely. He wagged his tail, looking up again, and took flight. They went through the opening, finding that both women were still waiting for him. The riders flew ahead while he and Toothless kept a slight distance.

There was a lot going on in Hiccup's mind, mostly regarding his mother. He'd just found her after 20 years, and he knew that she had devoted herself to protecting as many dragons as she could by bringing them here and looking after them, yet he couldn't help the thought of her and her dragons coming back home now. He was a little worried about his dad's reaction, though. Over the years, he'd heard the sadness and melancholy in his voice each time he mentioned Valka, so he knew how much he'd loved her.

On the other side, he was still Stoick the Vast, the Viking chief of Berk, a man that was the stuff of legend—and for good reason. His strong character was widely known, and despite the fact that he had come to accept and even appreciate dragons, their well-being probably wouldn't be enough of an excuse when the time came for his mom to meet again face to face with him. Hiccup feared his father would have the worst reaction instead of the best.

Pushing those thoughts aside, he turned his focus to Valka's companion's dragon. An Ice Fury? He'd never heard of any such thing. Shouldn't it be recorded in the Book of Dragons or at least in Bork's notes? After all, Night Furies were mentioned in the Book of Dragons, even if their description was somewhat lame before Hiccup met Toothless.

His mom had been right; he wouldn't have believed it if he hadn't seen it by himself. He and his friends had found—and even fought—dragons that could shoot acid, scalding water, smoke, toxic mist, sonic waves, and even lightning, but who would've thought that there were also ice-breathing dragons? It was just so odd; ice and fire were absolute opposites. The biggest shocker, though, was that there were Furies capable of doing so. How could ice- and plasma-breathing dragons belong to the same species?

So absorbed in his reflection, he didn't realize he'd gone into automatic mode while following Valka and Elsa until he heard the racket of several dragons behind him. It also dawned on him that they were flying over the sea, on the other side of the ice barrier surrounding the sanctuary. What were they doing there?

"Hey, I-I thought we were going to eat!" he exclaimed, looking at his mother.

"Oh, we are!" she replied, raising an open palm to tell him to stop as her dragon turned around so they both were facing him and Toothless. Then she looked down, smiling, and he saw in her eyes that she wanted him to do the same, so he did.

Below them, close to the sea surface, a small pod of two-headed dragons he recognized as Seashockers was circling a considerably

large group of fish. They swam away, however, when a massive white creature began rising from the depths. Its tusks emerged first, breaking the relative calm of the waters, just before the Bewilderbeast trapped the school of fish in its open jaws, leaving its prey no chance to escape at all. The gigantic dragon's appearance had made Hiccup's heart jump, but just when he thought nothing could surprise him any more than that, the king of dragons spat the fish into the air before retreating back into the sea.

There, watching with mouth agape how the sheer amount of fish rained down on them, the words "feeding time" suddenly took a different meaning. The Alpha was feeding his flock.

In spite of the shock, he didn't fail to notice that his mother was doubling up with laughter. And in that moment, seeing the smile on her face and the joy she irradiated, he understood that he was worrying too much about too many things. He needed to relax and just enjoy the moment, and so, as dozens of dragons flew by him and pounced on the falling fish, and Toothless turned to look at him as if asking 'Can I?', Hiccup decided to simply let himself get carried away. He gestured at his winged friend with his hand in a knock-yourself-out way, and the Night Fury smacked his lips before diving at full speed, narrowly avoiding crashing against the other dragons, and angled himself again when they were less than three feet from the sea surface.

In less than three seconds, Toothless had already stuffed his mouth with fish. With a look of satisfaction on his face, he flew away from the flock and headed for a small, flat islet covered in snow. He dropped his fish there and began eating them one by one like it was the first time ever he ate fish. Meanwhile, Hiccup caught a glimpse in the distance of the Ice Fury and its rider plunging into the sea, emerging a few seconds later. He frowned. She had to be crazy to be swimming in such cold waters!

He lost his train of thought when a large shadow covered him and Toothlessâ€”a shadow belonging to his mother's Stormcutter which was carrying three fish in his snout. They landed on the other side of the islet, and his mom climbed down from Cloudjumper's back to join him.

"Are you full?" she asked.

"Are you talking to me or to Toothless?" Hiccup joked.

Valka laughed and looked at Cloudjumper. Instantly, the four-winged dragon threw the fish he was carrying into the air and exhaled a short puff of fire on them. The three fish fell to the ground, well cooked and ready to be eaten by all three of the riders.

"Save one for Elsa," his mom said, picking up two of the fish and offering Hiccup one of them. He accepted it and took his first bite just as Elsa and her dragonâ€”what was its name?â€”arrived. Hiccup tilted his head slightly. Hadn't she taken a dip in the ice-cold water a while ago? How could she be dry already? And most importantly, how come she wasn't even shaking?

The blonde rider already seemed to know that the remaining fish was for her because she simply took it and nodded her thanks to Valka and Cloudjumper. They all ate in silence during the next five minutes,

after which Valka spoke. "So, what have you been doing in the last few years, son?"

Hiccup thought of telling her his story from the very beginning but quickly dismissed that idea. He couldn't understand why his mother refused to believe that Berk was a different place now, but he'd rather not bring up the subject again by listing all the improvements he'd been doing to the island for dragons and Vikings alike. Perhaps she'd have a more open mind about it in due time. So, where to begin?

He took a hand to his chest as another idea occurred to him. Of course! That would work perfectly as a jumping off point.

"Well, why don't you let me show you?" he replied, pulling his map from beneath his flight suit. Oh, she would love to see this!

* * *

><p>By the time Wintergale finished feeding herself, Elsa found that the two Vikings and their dragons were already resting on a snow-covered islet not far from where the Bewilderbeast had emerged. She thought of returning to the sanctuary right then to let them have some privacy, but then she noticed the three smoking fish in the ground, and she understood that Valka still wanted her to join them.<p>

She was soaking wet, so she turned the excess water into snow and sent it away before landing. It was a good thing that she'd learned to hold her breath underwater. Since Wintergale didn't like eating what the Bewilderbeast gave themâ€"so as not to take any fish that could be of more use for dragons that couldn't swim like she couldâ€"the Ice Fury always went fishing her own food, and of course, Elsa always went with her. She enjoyed doing things the way dragons did, or as Valka used to say, 'becoming one of them'. It was also how she'd learned so much about them in such a short time.

She took the fish Valka had left for her and thanked her and Cloudjumper, after which they all ate without saying another word. Then, the moment the Viking woman broke the silence and asked her son that question, Elsa fixed her eyes on him. She too was curious about Hiccup's story, especially concerning his own personal encounter with the Night Fury. However, instead of giving a straight answer, the young Viking reached beneath his outfit and produced a small notebook which resembled some kind of journal.

"What is that?" Valka inquired.

"This," Hiccup announced solemnly, "is something Toothless and I have been working on in the last couple of years."

He knelt and opened the notebook, unfolding a large piece of paperâ€"revealing it to be, in fact, a map. From where Elsa stood, it appeared like it had several additions in every direction. Hiccup began explaining it excitedly to his mother without even looking up, so he didn't notice when Valka took a step back, a somewhat mischievous grin drawn across her face. Using her staff, she began drawing something on the snow, and it wasn't until she was nearly finished that Hiccup finally lifted his head, saying something about some archipelago. He frowned when he saw his mom walking about, until

he seemed to realize what it was that she was drawing.

It was Valka's own mapâ€”on a much bigger scale.

Elsa blinked. It was fairly detailed for a map drawn in snow with a rather large object. She couldn't determine if it was an exact copy of Hiccup's, but she was more curious about whether she'd been able to replicate it after looking at it for just a few seconds or if she'd drawn it from memory. Still, all in all, it was impressive.

"There," Valka breathed when she was finished adding the last few touches. Once more, Hiccup stared at his mother in amazementâ€”at least until Toothless trampled the map while apparently trying to create his own doodle with a huge icicle in his mouth.

Wait, what? Elsa wondered. _Where did that icicle come from?_

Valka just chuckled as his son shrugged, and her chuckle became proper laughter when Toothless opened his mouth to drop the icicle, only to discover that it had ended up stuck to his tongue. Of course, Elsa also joined in the laughter, while Hiccup just shook his head at his dragon.

"Come with me," Valka told Hiccup amid her last chuckles, climbing again on Cloudjumper's back. "I need to go back to the den for some new friends, and then I'll take you to a place I know Toothless will love."

Hiccup complied, folding his map and storing it away before following his mother who was already on her way for a destination unknown to him, but not to Elsa. In fact, she already knew where they would be going.

* * *

><p>Less than an hour later, all three of the riders and their dragons were having a good time thanks to a strong updraft that allowed them to hover next to a cliff side located a good distance from the nest. The dragons Valka and Elsa had rescued from the trappers' fort were standing on the cliff itself, tentatively approaching the edge as they watched the humans and their winged companions so relaxed and cheerful. Eventually, they gathered enough trust to join them, and within moments, the riders were surrounded by the newly freed dragons.<p>

Valka closed her eyes for a moment and lifted her head towards the sky before looking at Hiccup with the same smile Elsa had seen her with before. And there, suspended in the air, the Viking woman moved from Cloudjumper's back to that of a nearby Nadder with absolute grace. Elsa giggled when she saw Hiccup's amazed expression once more, not only because it was funny, but also because it was like watching her own reflection on a mirror. After all, she'd been through the same experience shortly after her arrival at the sanctuary, and she'd had the same reaction to Valka's dance with dragons which even now was progressing as she moved across other dragons' backs and wings.

The rider even landed on Toothless' right wing and walked on top of

it, stroked her son's hair while jumping him to get from one wing to another, and continued walking backwards until she reached its tip. She slid and fell purposely, just to reappear on her Stormcutter's back, and then she flew away from the updraft, followed by Hiccup to her right and Elsa to her left.

The latter noticed that Valka was smiling like she'd never smiled before. Granted, she always smiled whenever she performed said dance—which, according to her, was one of the most effective ways she had of creating bonds with 'newcomers'—but today, that smile was wider than ever. Elsa knew that Valka had been, in a way, showing off when she showed her all that she knew. That wasn't the case with Hiccup. She believed that Valka was not trying to show off now; she was just glad to know that her own son not only understood but also shared her gift, and she took pleasure in showing him how similar they were.

"Oh, when I'm up here, I don't even feel the cold," she heard Valka tell her son. "I just feel—"

"Free," Hiccup took the word right out of Valka's mouth. They looked at each other, and Elsa saw in Hiccup's face the very same thing she'd just seen in Valka's—a relief to know that he and his mother were the same indeed, thus confirming Elsa's belief.

Valka placed her staff on Cloudjumper's neck and threw her hands to her sides. "This is what it is to be a dragon, Hiccup!" she exclaimed at the top of her lungs.

This time, it was Hiccup who smiled mischievously, smugly even. "It's all well and good to call yourself a dragon," he said while locking some kind of lever in Toothless' saddle and unhooking a pair of harnesses from it. Then he stood and shouted, "But can you fly?", before jumping off the Night Fury's back and plummeting to the ground, making both Valka and Elsa gasp.

'Insane' was the first word that occurred to Elsa's. One had to be completely out of his mind to believe that he could fly on his own. But as it turned out, he could.

Her jaw dropped when he pulled a leather membrane that stretched from wrist to ankle on both his left and right side from his outfit. She turned to look at Valka's reaction and found that the rider was beaming with amazement for the first time—and for a change—since Hiccup's arrival. As for Cloudjumper and Wintergale, they were staring at Toothless who, at first, met their gaze with a gloating look along the lines of, 'My rider can fly, too!', but then seemed to realize something that made him open his eyes in fright and fly off after his dauntless rider. Valka and Cloudjumper followed him, but Elsa and Wintergale stayed behind, both of them choosing to witness this feat from a distance.

In that moment, Hiccup reminded Elsa of a little kid getting really excited to show off the things he could do to his parents—namely his mother, in this case. Of course, Valka hadn't been around for him to do this during his childhood, but that jump off Toothless' back had been twenty years of showing-off condensed into one single instant. And from what Elsa could see from afar, Valka actually was impressed, even proud. As for the rider from Arendelle, well, her concept of Hiccup had just shifted from 'nuts' to 'genius'. Like

mother, like son_, she thought.

Suddenly, Hiccup seemed to lose control of his flight, and when Elsa looked up, she quickly understood why. Right up front, standing in the young Viking's path, was a large rock hill with two small arch-like openings leading to the other side—and he wasn't exactly heading to either of them. Toothless immediately hurried to catch up with him, blocking his rider from Elsa's view, but even she could tell that he wouldn't get there in time to save him. Fortunately, when Toothless closed his wings to cross the largest opening, Hiccup was nowhere to be seen, so Elsa assumed that he'd somehow managed to correct his angle to make it through.

In the meantime, Valka and Cloudjumper had flown over the rock hill and disappeared on the other side. Elsa and Wintergale circled around it instead, and from the air, Elsa saw Toothless lying on the snow—and Hiccup was still missing. Even the Night Fury took conscience of this when he shook his head and lifted one of his wings, apparently hoping to find his rider safely beneath it, and panicking when he didn't.

His panic attack was short-lived, though, since not two seconds later, Hiccup jumped from under the snow, cheering and jumping excitedly. Toothless didn't seem amused by his rider's childish antics, as evidenced by the way his expression went from sheer terror to something like 'I should've seen that coming'—and also by his knocking Hiccup off his feet with his tail.

Relieved to see the boy alive and well, Elsa told Wintergale to touch down less than a dozen meters away from them. Valka and Cloudjumper, on the other hand, had landed a mere six feet away from them, and while the Stormcutter shook off some snow that had probably fallen upon his head when Toothless crash-landed, the Viking woman simply chuckled and ran to his son. She started to examine his flight suit, but soon she lost interest in that when she looked at Hiccup.

Elsa had picked up a place with a better angle this time, so she had no problem seeing the pride in Valka's eyes. She said something she couldn't make out, and she felt tempted to eavesdrop on their conversation again by creating a few ice streams from the snow at her feet, but in the end she decided against it, letting the Vikings have the moment to themselves.

Valka kept talking in a low voice, her pride becoming shame and regret then hope faster than Elsa could blink. Hiccup looked down for a moment, and when he met her mother's gaze again, he smiled, making Valka smile in relief as well before she walked up to where Toothless was. She told Hiccup something else before she placed her hand on Toothless and slid it all the way to the back of his neck. She began massaging it in a circular motion—and suddenly, the fins along his back popped open, revealing them to actually be two fins in one.

"Now, you can make those tight turns," Valka announced in a voice loud enough to finally let Elsa listen to her. Toothless shook his entire body before taking a look at the double row of V-shaped fins, and then he smiled widely and hopped to his rider's side, wagging his tail.

"Did you know about this?" Hiccup asked, to which Toothless replied

by folding and extending his fins alternately. Obviously, this was news as much to the black dragon as it was for the Viking boy.

"Every dragon has its secrets," Valka told Hiccup with a chuckle, "and I'll show them all to you. We'll unlock every mysteryâ€"find every last speciesâ€"together, as mother and son."

While she talked, Toothless kept jumping about until he jumped into the snow and began moving underneath it and towards Cloudjumper. The latter lowered his head to follow the path the Night Fury was leaving in his wake, so when Toothless leaped out of the white powder, some of it ended up in the Stormcutter's head. The look on the four-winged dragon's face was pretty amusing in itself, and the situation only became funnier when he dumped the snow on Toothless' head and regained his dignified stance. All three of the riders chuckled at this image.

"This gift we share, Hiccupâ€"it bonds us," Valka continued, looking into Hiccup's eyes and placing a hand on his shoulder. "This is who you are, sonâ€"who we are. We will change the world for all dragons! We will make it a better, safer place!"

"Yeah! I mean, thatâ€"soundsâ€"amazing!" Hiccup replied, stammering again. His mother then embraced him tightly, and while it took him a moment to return the hug, he finally wrapped his arms around her and leaned his head on her shoulder.

Meanwhile, though Elsa felt privileged to bear witness to this heartwarming moment, she was already wonderingâ€"

"You wouldn't happen to share that double spine ability, do you, Wintergale?" she whispered into her dragon's ear. The Ice Fury simply stared at her smugly, and Elsa heard the sound of leather unfolding behind her. Indeed, when she turned around to see, there was the row of double fins in 'V' shape. "Why didn't you show me this before?" Elsa insisted, but the white dragon simply let her ears drop an inchâ€"a gesture she'd learned to interpret as a shrug.

Obviously, this had to be part of what Valka had learned about Furies with Wintergale. Elsa couldn't shake the thought that perhaps there still were some hidden abilities she knew nothing about.

"Oh, this is so great!" she heard Hiccup exclaim when he and his mother let go of each other. "Now you and I can go talk to Drago, together."

What? Elsa wondered.

"What?" Valka replied, mirroring Elsa's own thoughts, as Cloudjumper approached her. "There's no talking to Drago."

"But we haveâ€"

"No, we must protect our own," Valka interrupted Hiccup, cupping the Stormcutter's head between her hands, and added, "Come on, we should be getting back."

Hiccup's face quickly became one of frustration as his mother and her dragon walked away. Elsa tried not to pay much attention to it, since

it was probably just another childish behavior, like those kids that threw a fit when their parents didn't do as they said. She urged Wintergale to take off and follow Valka, but just before they flew away, she caught one final glimpse of Toothless still bragging about his newfound ability.

She also noticed Wintergale's reaction to the Night Fury's antics. In fact, the look of surprise and glee she'd seen when the Ice Fury first saw her black counterpart had been fading slowly the more she spent time near him, and by now, it had vanished completely, being replaced by a look of indifference, almost like as if she were unimpressed by the younger Fury. Elsa shook her head.

"You do realize that he might be the last Night Fury alive and that the survival of your species might depend on the both of you," she told Wintergale, more a statement than a question.

The Ice Fury simply shrugged again.

* * *

><p>AN: Yeah, I know it took me a while. Won't bore you with all the complications I had to update; suffices to say that I'm finally back with another chapter and still not willing to leave this story unfinished.**

Anyway, I hope you liked this chapter, especially Wintergale's progressing reaction to Toothless. I want to reassure you, they will end up together; they'll just need some time. And **I know Elsa was mostly pushed into the background this time, and to be honest, the same will happen in two or three more upcoming chapters, but trust me, you'll love it when she finally jumps into action. Speaking of whichâ€|**

A while ago, a relative of mine who is also a Dragons fan shared a link with me that allowed me to watch HTTYD2 online, and in the last few months, I've watched it no less than seven more timesâ€| including the scene where Stoickâ€| well, you already know. The point here is, aside from a few things here and there to bring Elsa into the story, I used to be adamant to change the main plotline of the film, mostly because I believed it helped shape Hiccup into the character we see at the end.

However, after seeing that scene so many timesâ€"and crying my eyes out each timeâ€"I've finally reached a point in which I can no longer make that decision by myself, since part of me still wants to let Stoick die, but another part also wants to save him and let him have a happy ending with his family. And you know what the worst part of it? I actually have an idea of how to develop both plots!

So, I've opened a poll.

That's right, since you're a vital part of this story, I've decided to include your opinion in its development. You can find the poll in my FF profile page, and it is fairly simple. There's only two options: kill Stoick, or save Stoick. Whichever choice gets the most votes will decide the fate of this story.

Unfortunately, there's a catch (You didn't think it was really **_that_**** simple, did you?). In fact, it's also the main reason

why I'm so hesitant to choose which path to take. Basically, Hiccelsa is still not happening, but there ****_will_**** be a friendly bond between them that will grow as the story progresses and which might still be of the liking of Hiccelsa shippers. Now, killing Stoick would most certainly provide an element which would allow them to make that bond strongerâ€”you know, with the whole 'I've lost my parents, too' thing and all thatâ€”but saving him ****_might_**** take away that. There would still be a good relationship between Elsa and Hiccup, but it may or not be slightly less closer.**

It's up to you.

If you don't have an account in FanFiction and are unable to submit a vote, you can always leave it in a guest review, and it will still be taken into account. The poll will be open until after I upload Chapter 19 (no date for that; I'm done with self-imposed deadlines) since the closing paragraph of Chapter 20 will already need to be adjusted accordingly. So, don't rush it; take your time and think it through.

Anyway, now that I've explained all the dynamics of the poll, I want to formally apologize for not replying to Chapter 15 reviews last time. To make up for it, I'm replying to them this time, and for those who left reviews for Chapter 15 **_and_**** 16, you'll get a sort of double reply. So, let's do this:**

UnknownBlackHand (x2):** That's right, Hiccup's finally here. I hope you enjoyed his POV in this chapter. Thanks for reviewing!

>Angryhenry (x2): Yay indeed! And in the next chapter they'll finally get to have a proper chat. Thanks!

>White Hunter: He won't know of her royal title just yet, but he will eventually. And as for Toothless and Wintergale, well, it's gonna take them some time. At least they've finally met. Thanks for reviewing!

>Crystal12: They've finally met but won't get the chance to actually talk to each other until the next chapter. Thanks for your encouraging comments!

>Bteam: Thank you, and forgive me for not replying last time!

>Pabulover123 (x2): I guess your second review made up for the first one ;). I think you and I are on the same page regarding the events of HTTYD2, though as I said, I can't make the decision whether to change that specific part or not by myself anymore. I don't think much would change if I manage to play my cards rightâ€”assuming the majority vote for saving Stoick, that is. And yup, Anna in OUaT is great! Thanks for reviewing!

>raigalcc: Glad you liked it. Thanks!

>magiclover13 (x2): You know how to make a writer feel absolutely flattered! Thanks again for such wonderfulâ€”and extensiveâ€”reviews! You're right; Elsa was the one who kicked Eret's behind. Thanks as well for your comprehension regarding my latest writer's block. And as for OUaTâ€”well, I guess we already have much to discuss, don't we? ;) Thanks again!

>alive-in-us: Phew, thank goodness! And thank you! I'm glad you liked that entrance. Did you like this one?

>Art n' Music: I wanted it to resemble Valka's while in rescue missions and the like becauseâ€”in-storyâ€”it would make the stories of the 'dragon rider' much more fearsome and interesting.

Though when it's only Valka and Elsa, she still uses the rider outfit she made before leaving Arendelle. She also used it in this chapter, btw. Thanks for reviewing!

>Velvetpru'd: I hope you liked that short meeting between them. Thanks!

>guest Spider: They will get along, given enough timeâ€"especially the two Furies. Thanks!

>Halley Vanaria (x2): Yup, they finally met and even flew togetherâ€| more or less. I hope you liked this chapter, and thanks for the reviews!

>ArmyWife22079 (x2): Fluent in sarcasm! LOL! From what I read, I already like your daughter. Not sure if I'd say the same thing if I lived with her every day. Are you up to date with OUaT? And thanks for reviewing!

>GraceSophia (x2): Yeah, I guess I do love writing that kind of cliffies. As for jealous Astridâ€| oh, you have no idea. And OUaT Anna is awesome! I too hate having to wait a whole week to watch the next chapter, especially now that the relationship between [SPOILER] has apparently been revealed! Thanks for your lovely reviews and kind words!

>dimkaxoxo: Thank you!

>PascalDragon (x2): The Bewilderbeast looking at Elsa's outfitâ€| LOL! Yeah, maybe that gave him a clue. I'm glad you liked Valka and Elsa using the same outfit during the attack, as well as my AU theory. And yeah, Wintergale rulesâ€| quite literally. Let's hope OUaT keeps up the good work. Thanks for your review, Sven! (P.S.: I know the feel, bro; I've also been replaying the soundtrack over and over again. It's just that good!)

>SonOfCoul 037: Nah, those two will only be friends, though it will end up being a heartwarming friendship. I just can't break Hiccup and Astrid apart. Thanks for the review and the encouraging words!

>the great fan: Hahaha, oh, you made me laugh so hard with those first lines you wrote! Thanks for the kind words; I'm glad this story has been of your liking, and I hope you'll still like it by the time we get to the end. In Toothless' case, it was love at first sight indeed. Can't say the same for Wintergale right now, but she will fall for him eventually. And yeah, didn't give it much thought at first, but now that you mention it, they should've included some mention regarding those points. Thanks for the wonderful review!

>Azlea: I'm glad you liked his introduction. Thanks!

>MysteryGirl7Freak (x2): Well, you got Toothless' reaction just right. I'm glad you like the interaction between Valka and Elsa. And I sooo enjoy seeing Elsa and Emma together. Thanks for the reviews! (P.S.: Yes, time does fly when you're in college. What exactly are you studying?)

>zoewinter1 (x2): I'm glad you like the story. Thanks for your reviews!

>Hang Tuah: Yup, Elsa rocks! I'm glad you enjoyed that bit between Elsa and the Bewilderbeast, as well as her debut as a 'crazy feral vigilante dragon lady', as Hiccup would put it. Thanks for reviewing!

>Dario Soto: Thanks for the review and encouraging words! Can't say I'm familiarized with Skyrim, but I still appreciate the suggestion.

>Zype: Yes, they did. Thanks for reviewing!

>Skreechlen86: Thanks!

>Crossovernaru: O_O Wow, I'mâ€| overwhelmed. All fifteen in one go? I didn't think it was _that_ compelling. Thank you so much for your review and kind words! And sorry for taking this long to update.

>Ghost (x2): Yup, Toothless and Wintergale will end up together. As for Hiccup and Elsa, don't worry, they'll just be friends. I too like the original pairing better. And Elsa has indeed become Valka's apprentice; do you like it? Thanks for reviewing!

>ivanganev1992: Stoick's chances might improve indeed. I guess it all depends on the opinion of the public. What do you think? Thanks for reviewing! (BTW, I didn't get your e-mail; apparently FF deleted it from the review.)

>Marcus S. Lazarus: Man, all I can say is, WOW. You've really been paying attention to everything, haven't you? Thank you so much for your review! And don't worry, Hiccup and Astrid 'till the end of time! I also believe he and Elsa might develop a sibling-esque relationship, and a lovely one at that. I hope you enjoyed this chapter!

>DaziY is SoniQ: You actually got all the references! Kudos, and thanks for reviewing! I hope you liked this chapter

>Ageiko: Yeah, it could be like you say. Still, it was funny to be able to play with that 'knowledge-of-Furies' idea. Thanks for reviewing!

>Saber The F4U Corsair: Nope, they'll be just friends. Thanks for reviewing!

>NextToBest: Sorry I thought this long to update. And thanks for reviewing!

>amillipede: Hehe, thanks for the encouragement! I hope you enjoyed this chapter.

>J. : OUaT is short for the TV series 'Once Upon a Time'. Thanks for the review!

>udateee: Nope, no Hiccelsa in this story. Thanks for reviewing!

>Guest: Hehe, thanks! I hope you liked this chapter.

>SharKohen: Well, that's a first. Scary how? And thanks for reviewing!

>Dragonspirit996: Sorry, been away for a while, but I'm finally back. Thank you for your review!**

Whew! I finished replying to everyone. Please remind me never to leave reviews unanswered for so long.

Remember, the poll will remain open until Chapter 19 is uploaded. Needless to say, I'll still need to upload Chapter 18 before that. Until thenâ€|

Don't forget to review on your way out!

18. A Family Reunited

**A/N: Merry (belated) Christmas! Yeah, I know it's been well over a month since my last update. Apologies for that; writer's block can be a pain sometimes. Add the stress caused by all the work and homework I was neck-deep in for several weeks, and it only made things worse. Then there's the whole Christmas thing and family reunions and the like. Not complaining about that last bit, just sorry that it stood

in the way of updating faster. But, hey, I'm back now with a new chapter, so, enjoy!**

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><p>Having returned to the sanctuary a bit later than the other two riders, and seeing as how his mom was apparently nowhere to be seen, Hiccup decided to land on one of the higher cliffs overlooking the lake in the middle of the nest. The young Viking switched his left 'foot' to its normal setting before climbing out of Toothless' back, and he walked closer to the edge. Despite the sheer amount of dragons flying all around, this spot was relatively quiet and peaceful, though not as much as the place where he'd crash-landed. Come to think of it, why had he returned here if all he wanted was a place where he could be alone with his thoughts for a while?<p>

Of course, the answer was simple: he wanted to be as close to his long lost mother as possible. Yet at the same time, he wanted to go find Drago before things could escalate to an all-out war—something both she and his father had already decided was inevitable. Frustrated, he grabbed a mossy stone from the ground and threw it as far away as he could, hoping it wouldn't hit any of the dragons around him. It wasn't enough to ease his frustration, but it did help him to blow off some steam. He knelt, placing his hands on his knees, and sighed.

"And I wondered why they got married," he muttered. "They're definitely made for each other. They're just so alike."

"How so?" he heard a female voice behind him. Startled, he spun around without standing and nearly lost his balance. There she was again—Elsa, his mom's companion and fellow dragon rider.

"Uh—um—" For some reason, he couldn't articulate a word. This was the first time he got a good look at her, and by Odin, she was gorgeous. Not as much as Astrid, even though she resembled her somewhat with that blonde braided hair and ice blue eyes, but she was a beautiful woman indeed. It wasn't her beauty what made him lose his speech, however. No, there was something else about her, something he couldn't quite put his finger on—almost like she commanded respect with her mere presence—

"Why are you so nervous? I don't bite," Elsa said, breaking the awkward silence. Then, in an obvious attempt to lighten the mood, she added with a smirk on her face, "Wintergale does that for me."

"Wintergale?" Hiccup repeated. "That's your—um—your—"

"Ice Fury."

"Ice Fury, right," he nodded. How could he forget the name of the white dragon's species so fast? "Sorry, I-I-I'm still trying to get my head around the fact that she exists."

"Trust me, I've known her for some time, she's my dragon, and _I_ still can't get my head around it," Elsa replied, smiling more kindly now. "I reckon you feel the same way about Toothless, don't you?"

Huh, she paid more attention to Toothless' name than I did to Wintergale's, Hiccup thought. He turned to look at the Night Fury. "Five years. He's been my friend for five years. The things we've done, all the places we've seen—it still feels like a dream." Then he turned around again to look at Elsa and her dragon—and realized something. "Wait. W-where is Wintergale?"

"Resting," she replied casually, walking closer to him and crossing her arms like a big sister would to a younger brother who just pulled a prank on someone. "Now, why did you say your mother and father were so alike? Because from what I've heard, there couldn't be two people more different from each other."

From what she's heard? So, Valka had told her about Stoick. Hiccup sighed heavily again. "What exactly has my mother told you about him?" he mumbled, not entirely sure if he wanted to learn of her opinion about his dad.

"Aside from the fact that he used to be a fearsome dragon-slayer," Elsa replied, "nothing but good things. I think she still loves him."

Hiccup looked at Elsa when she said that last sentence, a spark of hope in his heart. Her peaceful gaze reassured him even more, though it remained to be seen how Stoick would react when he learned that his dead wife wasn't dead after all but living among dragons for 20 years. That brought him back to reality, and his smile faded. "Well, they may've had their ideological differences in the past, but they're both equally stubborn," he finally answered Elsa's question.

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," he heard her mutter.

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "What was that?"

"Nothing," she shrugged it off and quickly returned to the subject. "Why do you think they're both 'equally' stubborn?"

He sighed. "Did you hear what she said when I told her we could go talk to Drago?" he argued.

"She said that no one talks to that man."

"And that we must protect our own. That was almost exactly the same thing my father told me before I left Berk to find Drago."

Elsa tilted her head to one side. "Almost?"

"He's trying to prepare me to be his successor, so he used the word 'chief' instead of 'we'," Hiccup explained, "but aside from that—"

"I see," Elsa replied softly.

"What's your story, anyway?" Hiccup asked her, trying to take the conversation in another direction. "H-how did you train Wintergale?"

"I could ask you the same thing about Toothless," Elsa countered.

"I asked first."

Elsa held her gaze for a few moments, challenging him, but eventually she relented and said, "Fair enough." She walked away from the cliff edge and sat down on a rock. Hiccup followed her and sat across from her on another rock. She took a deep breath. "When Wintergale first came to my kingdom my village, we didn't even know what we were dealing with. Dragons hadn't been around for centuries, so no one imagined that she could be one. Besides, she was so clever; she would exhale a cloud of icy mist and move within it, concealed, as she tried to raid our fish stocks.

"Apparently, she had previously been doing the same thing in other villages, because soon after her arrival, several men came looking for her. I must say that their presence in my village and their accounts of their previous encounters with the 'ice monster' as they used to call her piqued my curiosity. So, the very first night she showed up, I went out looking for her."

Hiccup listened closely and attentively to Elsa's account of how she followed Wintergale to a cave and earned her trust by bringing her food there, of how she found out that Wintergale was afraid of flying which actually took him by surprise and helped her find the courage to conquer said fear and fly again, of how she was forced to hide her, and of how the men that were hunting the Ice Fury down eventually found them.

"and that's when we met your mother and her own dragon. She saved us from those men, but she convinced me that Wintergale wouldn't be safe with me, so I let her go. Three years later, Wintergale showed up at my doorstep. I thought her return meant that Valka was in trouble, so I left my village and came here. The rest I think you already know."

"Yeah, my mom told me you've been traveling with her for a while," Hiccup confirmed.

"I couldn't resist the temptation to," Elsa replied, smiling widely. "Even if she wasn't really in any immediate danger, the idea of helping her save other dragons and in doing so, keeping my village safe somehow was too compelling to ignore. Now I feel like I'm part of something bigger here, not to mention all the incredible things I've seen." She looked away nostalgically for a moment and sighed. Then she fixed her eyes on him again. "Your turn."

"I'm-I'm sorry?" said Hiccup whose mind had begun to wander.

"Hey, I told you my story. Now I want to know yours. In detail."

She rested her head on both her hands like a curious kid and kept looking at him expectantly, her smile never fading. Hiccup chuckled but hesitated. He found it funny that her story was so similar to his own, yet it was also unique in its own way. He'd be delighted in sharing it with her and then make comparisons between both accounts.

But he couldn't afford to get carried away right now. Drago was still somewhere out there, and he needed to find him now more than ever, since Berk wasn't the only thing that was at stake anymore. But if

his mom wanted him to stay here, chances were Elsa wouldn't let him go. She probably was here at Valka's request anyway, keeping an eye on him for her. She didn't have the appearance of a strong Viking, but then again, neither did Astrid—who could beat even Snotlout in an arm-wrestling competition—so he didn't want to consider fighting his way out. Even if he did, there was still a chance that Valka would show up while he tried to leave. His only other option was to distract Elsa and try to make a run for it—but again, his mom was still a factor he couldn't deal with, and Elsa struck him as a smart and clever girl, which would make distracting her all the more difficult.

But what if he could kill two birds with one stone? What if he could convince _Elsa_ to distract Valka instead?

Nah, it was a crazy idea. Or perhaps it wasn't. She seemed nice enough, so perhaps she'd understand his reasons. Besides, they had quite a lot in common, especially concerning the way they both met their dragons. Maybe she could relate with his point of view because of that. Unfortunately, she didn't actually know how similar they were, and in order for her to learn that, he would have to tell her his story first—something he didn't have the time for, so he was back to where he started.

That, however, gave him an idea.

"H-how interested are you in it?" he asked her.

"Very."

"Enough to make a deal?"

Elsa's smile faded a bit as she frowned lightly. "Uh?"

Here goes nothing, Hiccup thought as he took a deep breath. "Help me distract my mother so I can slip away to find Drago, and I'll tell you my story when I return, details and all."

This time, her smile disappeared completely. She looked away, visibly troubled. "I—I think you should listen to both your parents' advice. If your father's opinion about Drago is the same as your mother's, I can only assume they have history."

"They do. My dad told me all about it."

Elsa looked him in the eye again. "And?"

"I-it—it was not nice," Hiccup replied softly, recalling Stoick's perturbing account.

"And you still want to find him?"

"I have to," he said firmly. "I-I really mean no disrespect to my mom or dad, but to be honest, none of them truly know me or what I'm capable of doing. I mean, I _can_ take that from my mom for obvious reasons, but my dad—" He paused. His voice had begun to waver, so he took a moment to compose himself. "For all he's seen me do and all I've taught him, he still can't take me seriously sometimes."

"So, what? Are you trying to prove something to him, is that it?"

Elsa stood and scolded him. She definitely sounded like an upset big sister. "Because it's one thing to train a dragon, but changing a person's mind is not always as simple and easy as that."

"But that's the thing!" he snapped, standing up as well. "I've changed the minds of lots of people others believed would never change. This is what I'm good at! Why can't you all see that?!"

Elsa looked hurt. She embraced herself and turned around, and Hiccup realized how rude he'd been. The way she'd reprimanded him had annoyed him, but surely she meant well. Maybe she had a younger sibling back home—a lively sibling she used to reprimand, all in good faith and out of love.

He suddenly felt ashamed of his attitude. He walked slowly towards her and placed a hand on her shoulder. As far as he could tell, she wasn't crying, but she didn't turn her head to acknowledge him, which only served to make him feel worse. Well done, Hiccup. You hurt the only person that could help you.

"Sorry, I-I shouldn't have snapped at you," he apologized sincerely. "But I know I can talk some sense into Drago and show him that there is another way, a-and even if I can't, at least I should try and find him instead of just waiting for him to attack this place."

Elsa lowered her head, still not turning. "There really is nothing I can say to stop you, is there?"

"I-I wouldn't think so," Hiccup replied. "Will you help me?"

She shook her head softly and said, "I'm sorry, I can't let you go." Then she spun around, a soft grin on her face. "Not alone, anyway."

Hiccup flinched. "What?" he asked, to which Elsa replied with a knowing look. "Y-you— you would come with me?"

"Sure. I can be of help," she said cheerfully.

Hiccup was taken aback by this sudden change of attitude. "Why? Not that I don't appreciate it, but— why?" he asked, not sure of how else to say it.

Elsa looked him in the eye. "I wouldn't be able to live with myself if something happened to you." Hiccup raised an eyebrow at this rather unexpected answer. "I-I mean, if you don't return, how could I show my face to Valka, knowing that I helped you escape?" she quickly added. Then she gave him a gentle nudge on his shoulder. "Besides, this way you can tell me your story on the fly."

She was clever. She'd just provided him with a win-win situation, so to speak. How could he say no to that? "Um— okay?"

Elsa smiled widely once more. "Meet me at the updraft cliff. I'll go get some supplies for the journey, just in case. And don't worry about Valka; she'll be busy enough with the newcomers we rescued a few nights ago."

Really? He had been worrying about his mom for nothing? "And you just thought of telling me this now?"

"Oh, hadn't I mentioned it already?" she replied with a mischievous smirk, and she ran off excitedly.

Hiccup followed her with his eyes until she disappeared inside one of the icy passages. He chuckled. Now she was acting like a young big sister, in the sense that she wouldn't let him get into trouble all by himself. Again, she reminded him of Astrid who also wouldn't let him 'have all the fun' like she used to say. Of course, things were different with her, seeing as how they were together, but stillâ€¦

He got distracted by the sound of baby dragons behind him. He turned around to find that they were 'attacking' Toothless. The poor Night Fury who had been sleeping peacefully was now desperately trying to get rid of the little rascals, until he finally decided to use the same trick Cloudjumper had used earlier that day to scare them offâ€”a loud and authoritative roar. It worked with all of the babiesâ€”except for one who kept chewing on the black dragon's tail for a short while longer, despite Toothless' sneer. Hiccup laughed while making sure his flight suit was in working order.

"Well, bud, I suppose it will be nice to have some company, seeing as how Astrid and Stormfly couldn't tag along this time," he told his friend once the last baby flew away, both rider and dragon taking in the view one last time. "Alright, let's go."

He didn't get a chance to climb on the Night Fury's back, though, for a large hand suddenly grabbed him from behind, covering his mouth. Toothless immediately turned around to protect Hiccup, but his menacing expression became one of surprise when he saw who it was that was holding the young Viking. The latter could only guess who it was.

"Easy now," he heard his father tell Toothless in a low voice.

"Are you kidding me?" Hiccup asked once he broke free of Stoick's grip. "How did you get in here?"

With the same attitude that did justice to his name, the Viking chief handed Hiccup his flight helmet and replied, "The same way we're getting you out."

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><p>Elsa decided it would be best not to look overly suspicious in case she ran into Valka, so she stopped trotting and slowed down to a casual walk after she entered the ice tunnels. She'd need to find another dragon to take her to her 'house' where she kept whatever provisions remained of what she'd originally brought from Arendelleâ€”including some chocolates which had miraculously survived her three-week long stay in the sanctuary. She was still pondering whether to bring Wintergale or not. Surely this would be a dangerous mission, and no matter how used the Ice Fury was to the danger, Elsa would rather not risk her.<p>

She reached one of the many cavernous areas dragons preferred for sleeping. Tiptoeing carefully between them so as to not wake them all up, she kept thinking of Hiccup. He was a nice kid, his one moment of rudeness notwithstanding. And at least he'd been humble enough to ask

for forgiveness. In part, she felt responsible for that fit; after all, she had scolded him, and she didn't actually have the right to do so. However, though she'd only met him that day, she couldn't help thinking of him as her brother already because, in some ways, he reminded her of Anna—stubborn, yes, but also optimistic and trusting, not to mention fond of adventure and excitement. Or perhaps it had to do with the fact that Valka had become a sort of motherly figure to her in the past three weeks, and since Hiccup was her son—

It would be nice taking some time to fly with him and get to know him a bit more. Maybe in time she'd disclose to him the whole truth of who she really was. For now, even though she felt bad lying to him, it would be better not to tell him everything. Elsa imagined Valka had kept that information to herself when she introduced them for some reason, perhaps to protect them both. Drago was still a menace, and no matter how many precautions they took and how much they fought, there was always a chance that any of them could be captured—in the best of cases. The Viking woman would probably endure more torture than her son, so for him it would be easier to keep her identity and powers a secret if he didn't know about them. That, in turn, would give her an even greater chance to take Drago and his men by surprise—

She shook her head. Look at me, planning ahead for our possible capture. Then again, by accompanying Hiccup to find Drago, the chances of that happening would be increasing. But even if it didn't, she decided it would be best to play along with Valka until the latter decided that Hiccup was ready to know—

She stopped. She'd spotted a couple of dragons that had caught her attention. They were sleeping like the rest, but those two dragons in particular stuck out like a sore thumb for one simple reason: they had saddles on their backs.

Moving as quickly as she could without waking the other dragons, she reached the spot where they were resting. She identified them as a Rumblehorn and a Hotburple, both of them rare dragons of which there were no more than two or three in the nest—and none of them looked like these. So, where had they come from? Were they from Berk—or did they belong to Drago?

She gasped when she felt a hand on her shoulder and spun around, hands held up high in case she needed to defend herself, only to find that such precaution wasn't necessary. It was Valka.

"You nearly scared the life out of me!" Elsa whispered. Then looking at the trained newcomers, she asked, "Where did these two dragons come from?"

"They're from Berk," Valka replied without hesitation. She pointed at a small symbol of a swirling dragon engraved in the Rumblehorn's saddle. "This crest is unmistakable. My son was telling the truth."

Valka sounded heavy with regret, like she should've believed Hiccup when he told her that everyone on Berk had changed. Elsa sighed. "Who do you think they belong to?" she asked her mentor.

"See this 'hand' attached to the handle?" Valka said, gesturing at

the Hotburple's saddle then at the weapons at the back. "You could say all these weapons are also handsâ€"interchangeable hands. There were many Vikings with prostheses in Berk around the time I was taken, but only one of them was fond of interchanging his." She took a step back and announced solemnly, "This Hotburple belongs to Gobber the Belch, the last descendant of Bork the Bold. And since Gobber has always been my husband's right handâ€"|" "

Elsa instantly understood what Valka was implying. "_He's_ here?"

Valka nodded and pointed at an axe on the back of the Rumblehorn's saddle. "He was very skilled with all kinds of weapons, but he always preferred using axes and hammers."

Then, without another word, she began walking away. It took Elsa a moment to react and follow her. "What are you going to do?"

"What should anyone do when chased by the past?" the Viking replied without stopping. Both riders reached an ice formation facing one of the narrow rock passages linking the sanctuary proper with the larger ice cavern. "There's no point in running away from it any longer. It's time I face it, whatever the consequences."

Valka stood right in front of the ice and stared at the tunnel expectantly, staff at the ready. The fact that she was apparently getting ready for a fight with her husband caused Elsa to fear the worst. She knew that the man was a fierce warrior, but could Hiccup's father really be so aggressive that Valka needed to defend herself? Would he really hold a grudge against her after 20 years? Then again, Valka had chosen to stay with the dragons instead of returning to her ownâ€"| and her own were Vikings, people history books referred to as violent and merciless. The rider had made it abundantly clear that she was the black sheep among them, a pacifist among warriors.

"Maybe you should let Hiccup talk to him first," Elsa suggested, now convinced that things could get ugly soon. "You know, toâ€"| prepare himâ€"| orâ€"|" She heard the echo of voices slowly approaching though the tunnelâ€"|"one of them Hiccup's. And as far as she could tell, he was already trying to do exactly thatâ€"|"without having much success.

"No," Valka said. "Despite all my efforts to leave my former life behind, I'm still a Viking, and I shall face this trial as such."

A short fat man suddenly appeared at the passage's threshold, his eyes opening wide in utter shock when he saw Valka. The large mace he had for a left hand told Elsa that this was Gobber the Belchâ€"|"a Viking through and through, as evidenced by his horned helmet and his long braided mustache that matched the description of some of the history books she'd read. At the moment, however, he didn't seem more menacing than a baby Gronckle. It was like he'd seen a ghostâ€"|" which was probably true in any case.

And still the arguing between Hiccup and another person who could only be his father kept getting louder. The worst was still to come.

"I will stay by your side," Elsa told Valka, assuming the same stance

as her, but the rider raised a hand to stop her.

"Stay out of this," she ordered. "This is my fight and mine alone."

Elsa shook her head and stood her ground, but Valka warned her against staying with a serious stare. None of them moved until Gobber disappeared back inside the tunnel, and only then did Elsa finally retreated into the shadows, although she stayed close by. Then the second rider from Berk appeared—a mountain of a man with long auburn beard and mustache, sword in hand, ready to jump into the fight—until his gaze met Valka's.

For the brief moment before that happened, Elsa got a chance to take a good look at the man of whom she'd heard only a few times and whose name was still a mystery to her. Now this was the epitome of what Elsa imagined a Viking would be—"tall and strong and mighty enough to take on a dozen enemies and beat them without even breaking sweat, with the countenance of a warrior whom nothing could faze.

Well, nothing except maybe finding out that his dead wife wasn't dead after all. For as soon as he saw her, he stopped in his tracks and stared at her with the poignant expression of someone whose dream was becoming true but who felt like it was more dream than reality, to the point where he seemed to lose the strength to even hold the sword which fell to the ground with a loud clang. Meanwhile, behind him, both Hiccup and Gobber and even Toothless stared at him nervously as he removed his horned helmet, waiting to see what he'd do next.

Valka, on the other side, didn't wait another second for him to make the first move.

"I know what you're going to say, Stoick," she said. "How could I have done this? Stayed away all these years, and why didn't I come back to you? To our son?"

Stoick. So that's his name_, Elsa thought. His current reaction, however, was anything but stoical, in her humble opinion anyway. In fact, much like Gobber—and perhaps even more so—he looked like he was staring at an apparition, and the moment Valka had spoken, his shock only seemed to grow, like he didn't expect it to do so. Even his movement was a bit clumsy as he began walking slowly towards Valka.

"Well, what sign did I have that you could change Stoick? That anyone on Berk could?" she continued. "I pleaded so many times to stop the fighting, to find another answer, but did any of you listen?"

Elsa frowned. How could this rant help her situation? It was like Valka actually wanted this to become a fight. Even her dragons seemed to sense it, because already Cloudjumper and a few other dragons were starting to surround her, as if ready to protect her from Stoick—and all the while, the latter kept moving at the same speed, not the slightest sign of rage or resentment in his face.

"I know that I left you to raise Hiccup alone, but I thought he'd be better off without me. And I was wrong. I see that now, but—" Valka's confidence finally began to waver as she stepped back the more her husband approached her until she had her back against the

ice. "Oh, stop being so stoic, Stoick. Go on; shout, scream" say something!"

Whatever remained of her defiant façade vanished when he raised his hand to hold her face, at which point she froze and simply stared at him expectantly, even fearfully. But the truth was that the very same hand that could probably crush her skull with ease was actually caressing her, like searching for confirmation that this was a real person speaking to him. And when any lingering doubts finally vanished from his face, Stoick's expression softened before uttering in a tender voice, "You're as beautiful as the day I lost you."

The roles were suddenly reversed. Now it was Valka who stared at Stoick in disbelief of what he'd said. Then, as if ashamed that she'd thought he'd harm her, she lowered her head and closing her eyes, a tear rolling down her cheek. And as if the moment couldn't get any more heartwarming, Stoick lifted Valka's chin in a loving way and gave her the sweetest kiss ever, his own eyes as watery as hers. Only after they separated"and after her dragons backed off"did she dare speak again.

"But" I" I abandoned you," she said in a low, quivery voice. Elsa shook her head. Why was she being so hard on herself? Did she really want so badly to be punished? Was that what her rant had been all about"provoking her husband to answer back or worse?

"Oh, Val," Stoick replied softly, caressing her face again. "Do you think I love you so little that vanishing for twenty years would make a difference? When all I've prayed for, every single night of every single one of those years, was one last chance to see you again? To hold you like this?"

And with those words, Valka at last fell silent and finally accepted Stoick's embrace, burying her face in his chest and starting to sob.

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><p>AN: Okay, I've got to admit I'm still not entirely convinced about this one, so please let me know your thoughts concerning it.**

I'd like to use the occasion to clarify a little something regarding Part II of this story. A couple of people expressed their concern that I was starting to 'hijack' HTTYD2, which I must admit isn't that far away from reality. As always, I appreciate all kinds of comments and have no problem with getting critical reviews. In this case, however, I feel the need to reassure people that I'm not just doing this because I've run out of ideas.

**The thing is, since I'm basically introducing Elsa into the movie plot, I wanted to describe the events of HTTYD2 from Elsa's POV and give her some perspective, aside from delving into her thoughts regarding those events. Besides, since I've been including Hiccup's POV in recent chapters, I wanted to delve into his mind as well and see what his opinion of her was before even meeting her properly. In any case, I have been adding a few bits that were not part of the movie, namely expanding those little unseen interludes between scenes. Finally, I need Elsa to have that same perspective because she'll need later to either save Stoick or bond with Hiccup over his

loss. Hopefully having cleared this up, this last reason brings me to my next subjectâ€|**

I've read all of the opinions regarding Stoick's fate, and a couple of them in particular made a good point of Elsa now having the power to change things drastically, not to mention that a few others provided me with some ideas of how to save him. So, with that in mind, I've been using some of that to draft a basic outline of the 'Save Stoick' plotlineâ€| and much to my amazement, it's actually turning out to be quite good! And as an added bonus, it seems I might not even need to sacrifice any closeness in Hiccup and Elsa's friendship on the long term. In fact, if this works out, it could end up being even closer than I had originally planned!

Now, I do have great regard for your opinions as readers, and I appreciate your comments and votes. However, before I make my final decision between killing Stoick or saving himâ€"though I must admit I'm currently leaning more and more towards the latterâ€"I would like to know whether the decision of some of you to let Stoick die was influenced by the possibility that Hiccup and Elsa's bond wouldn't be as strong if Stoick lived or if it was simply because of a sincere belief that this event defined Hiccup's character and led him to become the leader he was meant to be.

So, in light of all this, I've decided to close the current poll and open a new one where you can either change your decision or keep it. Once again, there are only two options: 'Kill Stoick', or 'Save Stoick'. This time, however, there is no catch. It's as simple as choosing between these two options. Also, the deadline for this new poll will be Chapter 20 instead of 19, giving everyone a bit more time to think their decision over carefully and without haste.

And this wouldn't be a proper A/N without replies to all reviews for Chapter 17, so:

dimkaxoxo:** I'm sorry to keep you waiting for so long. Hopefully, the result will be worth the wait.

>SynthesisSurge: Thank you!

>JDPstudios: Would saving Stoick count as a major change? Thanks for reviewing!

>PascalDragon: Thanks for understanding why Elsa hasn't been so active. Have you made up your mind regarding Stoick's fate yet? Thanks for your review, Sven!

>Dragonfan47: Your idea was awesome, though I still can't let you know if I used it or notâ€| you know, in case someone's reading. Thank you for your review, and also for the idea!

>raigalcc: You bet. Thanks for reviewing!

>the great fan: And I totally agree with you. So, are you keeping your vote?

>ArmyWife22079: I really loved how the whole _Frozen_ arc went in OUaT, but I don't think I'd be able to fit that in my story. It's just that I think OUaT's Elsa and my Elsa are so different from each other at this pointâ€"both of them strong and confident and powerful, yeah, but each of them in its own, unique way. Thanks for reviewing!

>White Hunter: Long live Wintergale, Ice Queen of all Dragons! :D Thanks for reviewing!

>Guest: Don't feel evil. Will you keep your vote?

>Ghost (x2): It wasn't intentional, but yeah, it kinda felt that way, didn't it? For the moment I'll stick with the whole Elsa's-or-Hiccup's-POV-change thing. And yes, Anna and Kristoff will return in later chapters. Thanks for your review!

>MysteryGirl7Freak: Just being curious, what was your original vote? And, are you changing it or keeping it? I hope you killed Hiccup and Elsa's first conversation. Thanks for reviewing!

>icecrystal1999: Sorry, still in love with Hiccstrid, though I hope the interaction between Hiccup and Elsa manages to compensate for that. Thanks for reviewing!

>Anomonous: Don't worry; I never thought you were cold or heartless. Thank you for your kind comments!

>Darkwolf123: Thanks for the encouraging words!

>GraceSophia: I liked your perspective of things concerning Stoick's fate, though I never learned whether you voted to save him or kill him. And I'm missing OUaT right now! They made such a great story while keeping true to the original characters! As for Ingrid, in the end I came to love her for what she did, despite the fact that she caused it in the first place. Thanks for reviewing!

>monkeyleaf: You're right, she could definitely change so many things, and she has become a strong enough card not to use. Thanks for reviewing and voting!

>Ali: Why, thank you Ali! I hope you enjoyed this chapter.

>Criticzar: I certainly hope my explanation eased your mind. Thanks for reviewing!

>Hang Tuah: Wow, you really helped me there with all those ideas! Can't tell you if I used them all, but I can say that I might have based my new draft on some of them. â€|Yeah, I'm afraid I'm being a bit cryptic. Thank you for reviewing!

>Dragon . Heart**. 0:_ Thanks!

>Cacao85: There you go. I hope you liked it. Thanks for the review!

>seps . heather**212:_ Sorry for taking this long. Thank you for your kind words!

>ColdFang: Oh, you bet there will be sparks. Thanks!

>

Next chapter will be a short one, so I really hope I can have it ready this weekâ€| but no promises. Until thenâ€| well you know the drill. Happy Holidays!

* * *

><p>P.S.: By replacing the original poll, its results vanished from my profile page. So, I'm adding them here, votes in reviews included:
**

**59.4% (19 people) voted to 'Kill Stoick',
>-28.1% (9 people) voted to 'Save Stoick', and
-12.5% (4 people) are undecided or gave no concrete answer.**

****Have a nice day!****

19. For the Dancing and the Dreaming

On her way back from the ice caverns, Elsa decided to pay Valka a visit. Her mind would most certainly be more focused on the task she'd left unfinished than on her family being reunited, so letting her know that the newcomers were now settled would give her some respite. Thankfully, assigning them a place in the nest where to sleep—which was the last step taken after bringing a new group of rescued dragons—usually was a simple process, since most of them tended to form 'flocks' with those who had been captive alongside them, although every now and again one or two dragons from any given new group would show signs of discomfort when around other members of the flock, in which case Valka would personally take them elsewhere in the nest. That hadn't been the case this time, and so Elsa had managed to complete the task without incident.

It had been a couple of hours since she'd slipped away from the place where Valka and Stoick had met again, just to give the Vikings some privacy. After that, all four of them, along with their respective dragons, had disappeared. If Elsa had to take a guess, the most likely place for them to be gathered would be Valka's 'house'—a cozy cave with enough openings in the walls to provide excellent lighting, enhanced by the natural light reflecting down the ice covering one of said openings and part of the ceiling, much like Elsa's Ice Palace. Also, given that it was located at the highest part of the sanctuary where the rock mountain and the ice ceiling met, there was an absolute quietness; the perfect place for a lovely family reunion. Thus, that would be where she'd check first.

The only downside of the cave's location was that it was only accessible by means of flying. Well, at least it was an issue today, since Wintergale would still be sleeping in her and Elsa's own house. Plus, with the unusual increase in dragon activity all over the nest in the past hour, chances were none of them would pay any attention to her, so she'd be unable to pick another dragon to take her there. They were restless, and she still couldn't tell whether or not it was a festive restlessness, like they were celebrating the reunion between their human friend and her own people.

Fortunately, she had an advantage in her favor—a magical advantage, in every sense of the word.

She reached the cliff side where she and Hiccup had been before. There, she created an ice path that went all the way to Valka's house and began climbing, getting farther and farther away from the racket of dragons in the center of the nest. The long walk turned out to be more tiring than she'd expected, though, and the more she neared the top, the more she wished she'd taken her chances in trying to find another dragon.

When she was only a few steps from the cave entrance, she stopped. It _was_ quiet—| _too_ quiet maybe. Perhaps they'd gone somewhere else, after all.

Well, it was worth a try, Elsa thought, turning around to leave. In any case, the hike had served as exercise, so it wasn't a total

waste. She would be taking a long nap once she managed to find a way to get back to her house. Maybe she'd create a staircase just for the occasion, even if it was a very long staircase. It didn't even have to be fancy, since she'd undo it later, but it would need to be strong in case a dragon or two perched on it while she was climbing it.

Then she heard a soft whistling coming from the cave. It wasn't the kind of whistle caused by the wind blowing through cracks in the ice. No, it sounded more like a tune, perhaps a lullaby, and a lovely one too. So, there was someone there. But why was everything so silent?

The whistling ended as soon as it had started, but this time Elsa decided to stay a little longer and see if something else happened. As it turned out, something did happen a moment later.

"I'll swim and sail on savage seas
>With ne'er a fear of drowning,
And gladly ride the waves of life

>If you will marry me."

Although the voice sounded a bit distant and faint, Elsa recognized it as Stoick's. Curious as to whyâ€"or to whomâ€"he was singing, she extended the ice she was standing on so she could tiptoe closer to one of the openings that served as windows. There, remaining concealed thanks to a couple of ferns sprouting from the rocks, she saw all four of the Vikings and their dragons. Hiccup and Gobber were sitting closest to the window with their backs to Elsa and their respective dragons beside them, staring attentively at Stoick and Valka who were at the far side of the room, also with their backs to her.

"No scorching sun, nor freezing cold," Stoick continued singing, caressing Valka's face," will stopâ€""

"Will stop me on my jourâ€| ney." Elsa turned to look at Gobber who had jumped from his seat and started to dance, attempting to join in the song, until Stoick turned to stare at him sharply. Then he sat down again. "Sorry."

Stoick, visibly annoyed, glared at Gobber one last time as a warning for him to remain silent before turning around again. "If you will promise me your heart," he continued, holding Valka's hand and bringing it closer to his chest," And loveâ€|""

He paused, as if waiting for her to replyâ€| but Valka remained completely still, her head lowered, and didn't speak. Then Stoick let out a discouraged sigh so loud Elsa could hear it clearly from where she was and lowered his head as well, and even if she couldn't see his face, it was obvious that he was completely disheartened by her wife's silence. Elsa pursed her lips and shook her head, unable to comprehend why her friend was so reluctant to accept his husband's love again. Did she believe herself unworthy of it, perhaps, after having mistakenly judged him?

"And love me for eternity."

Elsa's heart skipped a beat when she heard Valka's voice breaking the silence at last. As for Stoick, well, it was like a weight had been

lifted off his shoulders, and when Valka began walking to the center of the cave, singing, he seemed to take heart and followed her.

_"My dearest one, my darling dear,
>Your mighty words astound me,
But I've no need of mighty deeds
>When I feel your arms around me."

Having begun to perform a dance together halfway through her verse, the pace of the Vikings' song started to become faster—and at this point, Elsa could almost hear music playing in the background. What gave her greater joy, though, was seeing Valka smiling for the first time since Stoick's arrival. She even laughed and gave a shout of joy as Stoick sang his reply.

_"But I would bring you rings of gold,
>I'd even sing you poetry!
And I would keep you from all harm,
>If you would stay beside me!"

Elsa got a glimpse of Hiccup when he turned to look at Gobber for a short moment. He was as fascinated with the scene as she was, and given that these were his parents, probably even more so. Still, Elsa's excitement kept growing the more the song progressed, especially when Valka sang again.

_"I have no use for rings of gold,
>I care not for your poetry.
I only want your hand to hold—"

"I only want you near me!" Stoick sang in reply, and then both of them continued in unison.

_"To love and kiss, to sweetly hold
>For the dancing and the dreaming!
Through all my sorrows and delights,
>I'll keep your love inside me!"

Elsa had to stifle a laugh when Gobber stood again to dance—unintentionally kicking poor Toothless' face in the process—but this time he took Hiccup by the waist and lifted him from his seat so he could dance with him. And as if that weren't enough, he also joined in on the song, adding his personal touch to it, so to speak.

_"I'll swim and sail on savage seas
>With ne'er a fear of drowning,
And gladly ride the waves of life
>If you will marry me!"

There were lots of laughs and cheering when the song ended with Stoick holding Valka in the air—and Gobber holding his last note for a while longer. Elsa found it difficult to keep her laughter to herself, especially when Toothless covered his ears and groaned in response to Gobber's singing, but somehow she managed. Then, when Stoick put Valka down to embrace her, Elsa realized she'd never seen her so happy and gleeful before, not even after finding his son. That didn't necessarily mean that she hadn't been happy about that too, but now it was as if she finally were free to enjoy herself. And in

all fairness, she was free now; free from her guilt and shame and regret.

It took her a few moments to realize that her cheek felt wet. She took a hand to her face and wiped a tear off it. She was crying.

She had to step away from the window and sit down for a moment, leaning against the rock, to compose herself. Her tears were tears of joy; that was for sure. It filled her with joy to see her dear friend and mentor with her family, and it brought happiness to her to see such a moving reunion. But if anyone looked deep inside her heart, they would've found that her tears were also tears of sorrow and grief. Seeing Valka and Stoick and Hiccup so happily together made her think of what it could've been ifâ€¦

If only things had been different with her own familyâ€¦

Had her parents learned sooner that love was the key, the gates would've been opened ages ago, and to think of all the balls and feasts and parties that could've been but never wereâ€¦ and though it wasn't a common sight, the very idea of her mother and father taking part in a ball, and of her and Anna dancing together and watching their parents dance, and even dancing with them as wellâ€¦ Oh, what she wouldn't give to have a chance at that!

But her parents were gone, and nothing could ever change that fate. Not even she had the power to go back in time and change things or to bring the dead back to life. The best she could do was to keep honoring their memory and living the life they hoped she'd be able to live somedayâ€”a life where she could be with Anna, free from all her fears.

Anna. She would've been delighted to see what Elsa had just seen! She really missed herâ€¦ and her family too. Kristoff, Olaf, Sven, and everyone else in her kingdom. Perhaps now that Valka had been reunited with her family, there would be no need for her to stay. After all, what man or army could be stronger than the power of love and family? The answer was, nothing, and Anna had proven that four years ago. Drago wouldn't stand a chance against this familyâ€”and their dragons.

She wiped her tears and stood again, peeking over the rock to see the end of this reunionâ€¦ and finding that Stoick was on his knees before Valka, holding her hands between both of his. "Will you come home, Val?" he was asking her. "Will you be my wife once again?"

Elsa took a hand to her lips, and her heart began beating faster in excitement. This man had completely changed the concept she had of the word 'Viking' in only a few hours. Yes, he might be a warrior and a chief, but that didn't make him any less kind and considerate. Stoick wasn't just assuming Valka would agree to be his wife again. He was asking, very gently, showing just how truly he loved and respected her. He was re-proposing to her, for heaven's sake! It wasn't a demand but a choiceâ€”and Valka would be a fool not to say yes to it. And yet, she was hesitant.

Come on, Valka, Elsa begged in her mind. Say yes. Say yes!

Even Toothless seemed like he wanted it to happen, because he

approached Valka from behind and gave her a not so subtle nudge, sending her falling into Stoick's hands. Then, both Hiccup and Toothless came closer to the couple, both of them looking at her with pleading eyes, while Stoick stood up, still holding Valka's hands. "We can be a family! What do you say?" the latter finished.

"Wellâ€¦" Valka said, looking at all three of them with a smile across her face. "Yes!"

That was all Elsa needed to hear. She stepped away from the window and began walking away, back down the ice path. She heard Gobber making some comment about cooking and a bit of laughter, but she didn't pay much attention to any of it. Whatever else happened in that cave from that moment on was no longer her concern. What mattered was that Valka was going home, and no doubt she'd bring along all of the dragons in the sanctuary, including the Bewilderbeast. She didn't know how many dragons they had on Berk, but surely between them and Valka's, victory was on the side of the dragon riders.

Yes, it was time for Elsa and Wintergale to go back home too. Besides, she had a promise to keep, and she really wanted to know what surprise Anna had in store for her.

But before she could even make an inventory in her mind of what she needed to pack for the return trip, she felt a pair of paws grabbing her by the shoulders and lifting her from the ground. She didn't panic, for she knew exactly who it was, but she did find it odd that her winged friend would be here.

"Wintergale?" she asked. "What's happening?"

The white dragon made no sound in reply. She just threw Elsa higher into the air and stopped for a moment so that the latter could land safely on her back. Then she flew through one of the openings in the roofâ€¦

â€¦right at the same moment when an explosion shook the entire place, sending chunks of ice flying in all directions.

Elsa raised an arm to protect herself while clinging with the other to Wintergale's saddle. Meanwhile, the Ice Fury changed her course and flew downwards, touching down a few seconds later. The fuss outside was worse than inside the nest, although this wasn't the noise of dragons but of people. She lowered her arm and realized that Wintergale was standing on one of the highest ice spikes that made up the outer shell of the sanctuaryâ€¦ and the sight before her almost made her question her previous assumption concerning Valka and her family.

For far and wide across the island shore, as far as the eye could see, an army of massive proportions was laying siege to the sanctuary, supported by an armada that rivaled even that of the British Empire. Cannonballs flew all around her, hitting the ice shell and obliterating it bit by bit, and even more cannons were being unloaded from some of the ships and hauled by enslaved dragons to the battlefield, along with several other machines and weapons Elsa could only guess were for capturing dragons.

She instructed Wintergale to turn around, intent to fly back inside and warn Valka, only to find that they were standing precisely on the only ice spike which had direct access to the rider's house—and here came Valka already, trying to avoid the rain of debris caused by all the explosions.

"Elsa, what'sâ€|?" she began asking her, but the question became moot when she reached the edge and looked down. Elsa saw distress in her eyes, but only for a brief moment, before they became filled with rage.

"We've been expecting this," Elsa told the Viking, placing a hand on her shoulder and adding, "The storm has come."

Valka nodded slowly and looked at her. "And let the storm rage on," she said, fierce determination in her voice, raising a hand towards Elsa. "Ice and fire."

Elsa clasped her hand with Valka's and nodded as well. "Ice and fire."

By now, Valka's family was standing behind her, and when she began walking away, Stoick was the first one to go after her and reassure her by saying, "Val, it's alright, it's alright. We're a team now. Now, what do you want to do?"

She wasted no time in replying, "We have to save the dragons."

"Aye, you got it," Stoick nodded, gesturing at Hiccup and Gobber to follow them. "Come on, son!"

Elsa trailed closely behind. She may not be part of the family, but she was part of the team—the dragon riders' team. The time had come. Drago had finally found the sanctuary, and now he would rue the hour he decided to come against them.

And thankfully, Valka and Elsa were not alone anymore in this fight anymore.

* * *

><p>AN: And a Happy New Year! Maybe twelve days later, but it's within the first month of the year, so it still counts as New Yearâ€| right? *laughs nervously***

I believe you know what this chapter means. The battle has begun, and it's time to see Elsa in action! Unfortunatelyâ€| this also means I'll need some time to write the next chapter because I find it harder for me to write battle sequences. Between that and schoolâ€| well, let's just say I wouldn't be expecting an update within the next month. But if I can manage to put into words the ideas and images I've got in my mind, the result will be worth the wait.

Here are the replies to all reviews for Chapter 18:

Mistress of the Snow:** I must admit I've thought of doing it. I'm still pondering it. I'll let you know when I make up my mind. Thanks!

>Patty 4577: I know, right? Thanks for the review!

>monkeyleaf: And I agree wholeheartedly. Only one chapter left before we know the results of the poll. Thanks for your vote and your review!

>MysteryGirl7Freak: Dang, is there anything else left to say after those PMs? Now, that's a rhetorical question; I believe there is still a lot we could talk about! And I agree, this is what true love looks like (and long live AmyxRory too!). Thanks for your review!

>Bteam: Thank you! I'll do my best.

>White Hunter: It would be quite interesting indeed. I'm glad you liked it. Thanks for reviewing!

>Halley Vanaria: Neither can I. Let's hope I can have the next chapter ready sooner than I expect. Thanks!

>TheWritingFactory: There will be differences between them for some time, though not entirely sure they'll actually bump heads. Thanks for reviewing!

>ArmyWife22079: (SPOILER ALERT) Yes, Elsa will definitely forge an alliance with Berkâ€| but not yet. Thank you for the review!

>GraceSophia: Well, how about that? You are psychic indeed, hehehe. Thank you for your kind words and thoughts. I miss OUaT too. Let's hope Outlaw Queen finds its happy ending soon. And I do believe Elsa may have some sort of connection with the Bewilderbeasts. We'll have to wait and see. Thank you!

>Guest: I agree with youâ€| but at the same time, perhaps Elsa could also give him the same push this time? Thanks for reviewing!

>PascalDragon: Yes, I do believe Gobber saw Elsa, but his mind was more focused on Valka. It's good to know my interludes actually please my readers. Thanks, Sven!

>UnknownBlackHand: I seriously needed to hear that. Thank you!

>dimkaxoxo: Thank you so much! Happy New Year!

>Guest: It could, yeah. Part of me still believes thatâ€| but my shipper heart can't break Stoick and Valka apart! We'll have to wait to see what happens next. Thanks for reviewing!

>Guest: I'm not entirely sure. Somebody suggested an ElsaxEret pairingâ€|

>SharKohen: That would be an amazing fight! Thank you for your review!

>Ali: Thank you Ali!

>Mist: For the moment, it remains Hiccstrid, but at this point anything could happen. We shall see. Thanks for reviewing!

>crazy one: I certainly hope we can save him!

>Guest: Why, thank you!

>The great fan: Got it. Thank you!

>Nimbus Llewelyn: I visited your profile, and may I say I feel honored to get a review from a Beta member, especially from such a creative writer as yourself. Thanks! There will definitely be more interaction between Hiccup and Elsa, and even between her and Toothless. I admit I found in this story a way to share some of my theories, but I do hope later chapter will provide that human touch you mentioned. As for Toothless, I believe he could have been one of

the eggs that the Ice Furies took with them but that his mother stayed with her own Night Fury Mate to raise him until she was killed. Wintergale could've been about a year or two older than him. Thank you for your kind words and encouraging review! I look forward to keep hearing from you!**

Before I go, there's one more thing I'd like to mention. I'm looking for admins to manage my Facebook page "Piero217's FanFics", preferably people who can draw or know someone who does. It would also be great if they had an account on deviantart. The thing is, I'd love to post a few images of Elsa and Wintergale together, but I'm a terrible drawer/painter/designer/Photoshop user, so I'm looking for fans of the story that could help me out with that one. Is anyone interested?

Remember, the poll will be closed once Chapter 20 is online. You'll get to know the results afterwards. Take care, and don't forget to review on your way out!

20. The Battle of the Bewilderbeast

"I assume you are my wife's famous companion, young lady."

As the group of riders walked back inside Valka's cave, Elsa looked at Stoick and replied, "That's me. Pleased to meet you, sir."

"I'm sorry to cut introductions short," Valka interrupted, "but we need to move."

"Aye," Stoick agreed. "What's the plan?"

"You're already prepared for the battle," Valka replied while dressing up with her battle armor. "As you can see, I still need a few more minutes, not to mention that I must wait for the Alpha."

She didn't say anything else. She didn't need to; her plan was obvious. The other four riders should run ahead to assist the rest of the dragons and inflict some damage while she finished getting ready.

Everyone nodded in understanding of that. Stoick took his wife's hand and kissed it. He said something to her, but his voice was so soft Elsa couldn't make it out. Paying no mind to it, she climbed on her dragon's back, and without waiting for the Vikings, she and Wintergale left the cave. Before going outside the nest, however, she noticed that the ice path she'd created earlier was still standing. Deciding it would be better to avoid suspicion, she unmade it with a quick flick of her hand.

Not a second later, Hiccup and Toothless came flying from the small cave and joined her, the young Viking's outfit now complete with a helmet that covered his face until he raised the visor. "Hey, you itching to take Drago's army on your own or what?" he asked her teasingly. Then, noticing that she was still wearing no armor like Valka, he added, "Don't you use some kind of armor like my mom?"

"Hey, don't worry about me, Hiccup," she replied, dodging his

question. "I can take care of myself. You, on the other handâ€¦"

He furrowed his brow. "What about me?"

"Nothing. I'm not doubting your fighting skills, if that's what you're worried about. I just want to make sure you won't do something reckless like, say, trying to talk to Drago in the thick of battle."

"Oh." Hiccup pursed his lips for a few seconds, looking back at the cave. "I won't."

"You promise?"

He looked her in the eye. "I promise. Right now, all that matters is that we save the dragons from him. If he can't see the error of his ways once he's defeated, then I'm afraid my parents will've been right after all. Some minds won't be changed."

Elsa let out a breath of relief. At last the stubborn kid was listening to reason. "Good. Now, be careful out there," she told him. Then, she added in a more playful tone, "You still owe me a story, remember?"

"How would I forget about that?" he replied, lowering his visor as Stoick and Gobber joined them and all four of the riders flew towards the nearest exit.

The moment they were outside, Elsa went her separate way, looking back one last time and praying that Hiccup and his family would be safe. Then, once she was out of the Vikings' sight, she turned her clothes into her ice replica of Valka's armor and summoned a cloud of icy mist to follow and cover her and Wintergale, leaving only a small gap of air in front of her eyes so that her line of sight wasn't blocked. She was ready to take on some soldiers on her own.

* * *

><p>Hiccup watched as Elsa flew away and silently prayed to the gods for her safety. Whether she was as good a warrior as Astrid or not, truth be told, this would be the most challenging battle for the five riders yet. Having the Alpha on their side would be a great advantage, but none of them should grow too overconfident because of that. An army of dragons and men was a force to be reckoned with, especially one as well-organized asâ€¦|

He blinked when the battlefield came into view. Of course he knew that most of the dragons in the nest had begun attacking the invaders a while ago, and of course he expected to see evidence of a fight, but he also expected to find the same menacing army he'd seen earlier and several of those dragons already in traps or nets. Instead, he was seeing a bunch of soldiers in disarray, and there were more traps and artillery on fire than captured dragons. What was more, there was some sort of order in the destruction and chaos below, something that couldn't have possibly been achieved by the dragons alone, like the entire row of smoking traps which were most likely empty by now. Also, most of the artillery was being concentrated only on fourâ€¦"

He smiled when he realized who was responsible for such destruction.

They there were, all five of them, his friends and fellow dragon riders, and he couldn't be any happier to see them here. Snotlout and Fishlegs were carrying Ruffnut—who probably had fallen off the saddle—back to her dragon, and Astrid was trying to dodge some of the shots from whatever those Gronckle-shaped weapons were. And she was about to get crushed by a giant ice spike that had broken off after being hit by one of Drago's weapons.

Fortunately, he and Toothless were now close enough to assist, and without the need for words, the Night Fury blasted the falling ice to bits just in time to save her—and the guy accompanying her, whom he recognized as Eret. His smile grew wider. _So, the trapper's had a change of heart_, he thought. And despite the words of his father and mother, and even of Elsa, he couldn't help the feeling that perhaps there was still hope for Drago Bludvist, after all.

But that would have to wait. Saving the dragons was the priority, so he guided Toothless to a net catapult. Again, the black dragon didn't even wait for him to tell him anything; he just shot it.

"Yeah, baby!" Hiccup cheered, flying past the destroyed piece of artillery. Okay, he also wanted to let his 'raw Vikingness' out for a while and give the guy a lesson.

He rushed to catch up with Astrid, and as he did, he caught a glimpse of a white cloud gliding at great speed over the far end of the battlefield, much in the same way as a pack of Smothering Smokebreaths would. In fact, if he hadn't known better, he could've sworn it _was_ a pack of Smokebreaths.

But he did know better. That dragon _was_ clever, indeed. It came as no surprise, then, when three ice balls suddenly came out of the cloud and disabled three different traps arranged in close proximity, followed by one rider who began fighting the few remaining soldiers guarding the captive dragons.

* * *

><p>Out of the two, Wintergale had apparently decided to take the first shot by attacking a small cluster of traps, disabling them by freezing the exposed mechanisms. Still, Elsa didn't mind. If anything, she liked the Ice Fury's autonomy. But she wasn't about to fall behind.<p>

"Alright, girl, now it's my turn," she said, grinning. And the moment the white dragon flew right above the frozen traps, she created a staff and shield of ice also modeled after Valka's own and jumped from her dragon's back.

Using her ice staff as a conduit to channel her powers, she conjured a small mound of snow to break her fall, making it spread as soon as she was on the ground. Then she jumped into action, twirling her staff and knocking out the first two soldiers dumb enough to charge at her. The rest of the men guarding the traps, though visibly eager to engage in close combat, just unsheathed their swords and waited patiently for her to make the next move.

Big mistake, because her next move was a stomp on the ground that turned the snow beneath their feet into ice, causing them to slip and fall. Elsa, meanwhile, seized her opportunity and hurried to free the

dragons inside the traps, walking on the ice like she was floating over it. The few soldiers who were able to get back on their feet more quickly than the others were no match for her. A few more swings of her staff, and they were on the ground, literally knocked out cold.

Within seconds, she'd frozen the ropes of the first trap. From there, she jumped to the next one and from there to the last one, freezing the dragons' bindings as she went. She'd taken notice of a few bowmen raising their weapons and taking aim at her before even getting to the third trap, but she'd also seen something behind them that they hadn'tâ€”something that would provide her with a window of opportunity to leave the scene without a scratch.

Just as they were about to let their arrows loose, a sudden roar distracted themâ€”a thunderous roar that resounded across the entire battlefield and beyond. It was the battle cry of the king of all dragons, mighty and terrible. And he wasn't happy.

The shock of the Alpha's appearance only lasted for a few seconds, but by the time the bowmen turned their attention back to the rider in blue, she was gone. For she had used the distraction to jump from the last trap into the air, landing gracefully on the back of her Ice Fury as the latter glided closer to catch her.

"Nicely done, Wintergale," she thanked her winged friend. She turned her eyes in the Alpha's direction, and she couldn't help a wide smile when she saw Valka and Cloudjumper hovering right in front of it. The Viking's stance said it all: 'This is our land, and be we cursed if we let anyone else take it without a fight.'

* * *

><p>"That's your mother?!"<p>

"Well, now you know where I get my dramatic flair," Hiccup blithely told Astrid like it was no big deal. He lowered his visor and flew away, chuckling. To think that less than two days ago they were talking about him never meeting his motherâ€”no wonder she was so surprised. In fact, she'd just made a perfect impersonation of his own reaction when Valka told him who she was, whether she knew it or not. Man, he loved that girl's way of doing that.

He shook his head, trying to concentrate on the battle, and began looking for any dragons that could be in need of help. There didn't seem to be many that did, though. With the Alpha now in the scene, as well as his mom and her Stormcutter, the free dragons had gained a higher sense of coordination. Proof of it was the number of Zipplebacks that were breaking away from the main fighting group to attack the army on the ground at close quartersâ€”by using their combined firepower to turn _themselves_ into flaming wheels and rolling through the enemy lines, wreaking even more havoc than before.

The Alpha, for his part, wasn't just sitting and giving orders to his flock. He was actively taking part in the attack like a true king would, spitting several streams of ice and burying men and machine alike. Drago didn't stand a chance against the combined forces of free dragons and dragon riders. He had to know that, right? Then why hadn't he ordered his men to stand down already? Unless he was now

one of the people beneath the ice.

He lost his focus again when he saw in the distance a _volley_ of ice shots raining down on a pair of ships, or rather, on the sea waters around themâ€”and he witnessed the impossible when the waters froze solid. But he didn't get the chance to dwell on the fact. Out of the corner of his eye, he discerned a trap being sprung by one of the flaming Zipplebacks rolling too close to it. Hiccup and Toothless were the only ones close enough to do something about it.

_Guess I'm back on business. _"Come on, Toothless," he told his friend. "Show them what you got, bud!"

* * *

><p>Searching for more targets of importance to take care of, Elsa found a group of soldiers dragging half a dozen dragons to a ship similar to the ones she'd seen docked back at the trappers' fort. Another such ship was moving away from the coast, likely already loaded with more captured dragons.<p>

"Looks like they need our help, Wintergale," Elsa told her dragon. The Ice Fury roared, and without delay, she turned around and made a beeline for the ships.

Before any of the soldiers and sailors could react, several icy blasts coming from the white cloud hit the water around both ships, freezing it instantly. Ice spikes of considerable size grew all around the vessels, trapping them for good, and even lifting the second ship in such a way that its hull broke apart. A handful of cages, each holding a dragon, fell from the wrecked ship and to the frozen water surface.

Hoping that no one would pay close attention, Elsa shot a single bolt of magic at one of the cages, and it spread like lightning from that cage to the rest. The metal instantly cooled down to the point where it would break easilyâ€”a trick she had learned all those years ago when she was held prisoner in the dungeons of her own kingdom. With a few more bursts of ice magic shot with pinpoint accuracy, she froze the chains that shackled the dragons on the shore. The winged creatures then broke their bindings and prisons effortlessly, and they flew away, following the Ice Fury and her rider to safety.

* * *

><p>Unbeknownst to her, someone had paid close attention to the whole thing.

After setting that Zippleback free, Hiccup had seen almost everything that had happenedâ€”which, in all fairness, hadn't been much. He frowned. The shots he'd seen earlier had come from Wintergale's cloud, but that didn't make any sense. How could the Ice Fury keep her cover _and_ spit ice at the same time? And how could she fire that many shots in such quick succession? Not even Toothless could do such a thing. For that matter, those were far more shots than a Fury could fire, Ice or Night.

Something else that didn't add up was the huge ice spikes rising from the waters, as well as the sort of ice lightning hitting the cages that had fallen off the ship. That went beyond everything he knew

about dragons. For Odin's sake, it was unnatural. It was like magic. It made him wonder whether Wintergale was a normal dragon or if the gods had had a hand in her birth. Maybe she was a creature sent from the heavens by Skadi, the goddess of winter, or by some other deity.

Then he thought of his mom. Was she aware of Wintergale's supernatural nature? And if she was, why hadn't she told him anything? He shook his head once again and tried to turn his attention back to the battle, but his mind still couldn't shake his questions regarding Wintergale and Elsa. Did _she_ know about her dragon?

* * *

><p>Once sure the dragons were safe, Elsa fixed her eyes on yet another prize deeper inside the fleet.<p>

"There," she pointed at a larger ship laden with net launchers. She couldn't see any dragons venturing this far away from the shore; still, if there were any captured dragons on board that ship, they had to be freed. "Let's go get them."

Wintergale made a sharp turn upon looking at Elsa's objective. She picked up speed then slowed down to allow Elsa to jump again and land onboard. This time, instead of a mound of snow, the latter conjured an ice slide which she thawed once her feet touched the wooden deck. Unlike the soldiers guarding the traps on land, however, it appeared that the crew of this ship was already expecting her, swords and axes in hand. Yet her little trick had left most of them in shock and even elicited her some expressions along the lines of 'It's her!', 'The Ice Sorceress!', and 'She's here?' from those few who could find their voice.

For a moment, she was as shocked as the men around her and even forgot why she was there. _Ice Sorceress._ So, news of her existence had finally reached this far away from home—and judging from the fear in their voices, they hadn't exactly heard the nicest things about her. She grinned smugly behind her mask. _Good. They'll know better than to attack me._

"She's still just human! Get her, you cowardly dogs!" someone—most likely the captain of the ship—yelled authoritatively behind her.

Or perhaps not.

Elsa raised her staff and shield in anticipation of a fight, but it turned out it wasn't necessary. Not even the captain's order could get the crew out of their near-catatonic state. She decided to turn around to try and find the captain. It wasn't that hard; his was the showiest battle outfit of all. His breastplate was lined with several braided tufts of reddish fur, and he was the only one whose helmet included a visor that covered his face—but not the rage in his eyes. "Fine, I'll show you just how powerful the Ice Sorceress is not!" he bellowed, unsheathing his sword and taking the first step to charge against her.

That was as far as he got. Already Elsa had raised her staff and used it to fire a bolt of magic in front of the captain, creating several

icicles that rose from the floor and formed a cone around him, trapping him for good. One of the icicles even sent his blade flying away from his hand. Still unsatisfied, she waved her staff to conjure a menacing barrier of ice spikes between her and the rest of the crew, also sending a chilly gust of air throughout the ship. Then she challenged them with her gaze, daring them to make a move against her.

Everyone stood still.

Now that she felt reassured that no one would interfere with her mission, she focused back on the task at hand. Having landed next to a large iron hatch, she froze the locks and hit them with her staff to break them. When she opened the hatch, however, she was surprised to find not a single one of Valka's dragons but a dozen or so armored dragons. This was one of the ships carrying Drago's battle dragons—and it was obvious they were ready to join the fight. The only thing holding them back were the heavy chains tied to their feet.

Elsa knew that letting these dragons out would only make things a little bit more difficult to the free dragons. She was about to close the hatch, believing it would be better to return for them once the battle was over, but then a thought came to her. What if she could turn them to the side of the free dragons? Now that would be the most ironic thing—Drago's dragons fighting him. It was worth a shot.

Here goes nothing, she thought, taking a deep breath and leaping down to the cargo hold.

The pack of battle dragons grew even more restless when she entered, but she remained calm and confident. She unmade her staff and shield and edged closer to the nearest dragon with a hand raised. The dragon—a Thunderclaw—desperately tried to lunge at her, and it seemed like it wanted to bite her extended arm, but she didn't flinch nor step back. Eventually, it relented and lowered its face in fear, like expecting some kind of punishment for its defiance—and all of the other dragons did the same. Elsa pitied the poor creatures. She couldn't even begin to imagine what kind of torture Drago had made them go through.

"Don't be afraid. I'm not gonna hurt you," she said softly. She touched the dragon's face soothingly, even lovingly, and added, "I'm here to set you free. All of you."

But when she was about to freeze their chains, they pulled back, visibly frightened, looking all around them as if their worst nightmare had come to haunt them. Then the ship began rocking violently—and a loud roar pierced the air. Elsa recognized it as a Bewilderbeast's roar, yet it sounded different, more violent and filled with rage.

She conjured an ice pillar beneath her feet to lift her above the upper deck—and she lost her breath. Emerging from the ocean, crushing everything in his path and ignoring the fight around him, a black Bewilderbeast was making its way to where the Alpha was. His intentions were clear; he was there to challenge him.

So focused on the new menace, she remained oblivious to the whistling

sound behind her until it was too late. Before she could as much as blink, she was completely entangled between the cords of a pair of bolas; the next thing she knew, she was on the floor, having fallen from the pillar and smacked her head hard. Lying there with her face against the wood, she felt a foot on her back.

"Behold! Even the Ice Sorceress falters at the sight of Drago Bludvist's Alpha beast." That was the captain's voice full of sarcasm. Some of his men began laughing nervously at his statement while he drew his sword and knelt beside her. "Such a shame it will be the last thing she'll ever see."

Elsa felt the cold metal in her neck, but she couldn't fight back. Her head was spinning like it never had before, her mind stuck in a single thought: how had he broken free from his impromptu prison so quickly? That ice was strong enough to resist the pounding of any conventional weapon. No one should've been able to free him in such a short amount of time.

She was slipping off into unconsciousness. That was unacceptable. She had to find a way to stay awake. Before she fainted completely, she desperately tried to concentrate on the one reason she was fighting for. She was fighting for the freedom of Valka's dragons, yes. She was fighting to stop a very bad man, of course. But the one true reason why she had gotten involved into all this mess was because she was trying to keep her kingdom—her _family_—safe. Moreover, someone back home was awaiting her return.

Those thoughts were enough to bring her back from the brink and even infuse her with enough strength to fight back. However, before she could start freezing the ropes to free herself and strike back, the captain pushed her with his foot, making her roll on her side. He sheathed his sword and said, "You didn't seriously think we'd let you taste death so soon, did you?" Then he grabbed her chin and smiled arrogantly. "My master will be so pleased to know that the mythical witch with ice powers will be joining our cause."

Elsa gathered as much strength as she could to reply. "And what cause would that be, huh? Enslaving dragons and building up an army with them? Setting off to conquer the world with it?" she hissed.

"Oh, he might just set free every last dragon he has captured now that we have you. After all—" He made a pause and spoke into her ear. "—_you_ could take over the world if you resolved to do it, you know?"

Elsa raised an eyebrow at first, not fully understanding what the captain meant—until she recalled someone else speaking those very same words to her. Then she noticed the braided fur on his breastplate and realized that two of those braids weren't fur at all but _hair_—human hair. A pair of strawberry-blond braids she knew all too well. Her eyes opened wide as it dawned on her that she had already met this man before. That voice—A _captain_—

No.

"I told you we would meet again, Your Majesty."

* * *

><p>AN: Plot twist! Have you guessed already who the mysterious captain is? Yeah, I believe you have. Mwahahahahahaaa! Ok, that's enough of the evil laugh; let's get serious for a moment here.**

I knew some of you (*cough* Ali *cough*) would be quite eager to start reading the chapter proper the moment you knew I had updated. So, I decided to wait until now to apologize for the (don't kill me!) two-and-a-half-month-long delay. I swear I had this chapter ready since over a month ago; in fact, it was considerably lengthier and more elaborate. But as I told a couple of you people via PM, silly me apparently forgot the notebook he was using to handwrite his drafts at the bus stopâ€| or maybe it was at the subway. Anyway, the frustration of losing all of my drafts (a complete draft for this chapter and about 4 'dialogue drafts', as I call them) kinda sent me into writer-block mode. Remembering at least the highlights of my original Chapter 20 draft was really hard, but I hope I still delivered some nice battle action.

Halley Vanaria:** We're getting there. You'll know soon enough what will become of him. Thanks for reviewing!

>ArmyWife22079: Is she? â€| Okay, yes, we all know she is. Thank you for the review!

>Emori Loul (x2): My friend, I like the way you think. Thank you for the feedback and advice regarding Stoick's fate. Also, your extensive analysis on future events helped me gain some perspective (and ideas!) I sorely needed for the last part of this story. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you! And I look forward to hear more from you.

>Minecast Chris: As you can see, she has used her powers indeed. Did you like the way she used them?

>Nimbus Llewelyn: Okay, that's one historical piece of information I'm definitely never going to forget. I guess I'm simply a huge fan of the British Navy of old. Thanks for reviewing! (And I think I've found someone who draws some really nice fanartsâ€| for a fee. I'll PM you the link to her DeviantArt page in case you're interested.)

>magiclover13: It's not as perfect as I would've liked it to be (or, rather, as it already was), but I still hope it meets your expectations. Thank you as always for your words of encouragement! (P.S.: I miss those FB chats; sorry for not keeping in touch these past couple of months :/)

>Dragonspirit996: Thank you so much! Although, I'm afraid FanFiction blocked the link to your DeviantArt account when you reviewed. Can you send it to me via PM, using spaces between the dots, please?

>Mistress of the Snow: Thank you! Yeah, Elsa can be discreet while still caring about her dear friend. (Hey, I visited your FF profile page. You can definitely add me to your 'friend list' if you want ;).)

>guestRider: Yeah, maybe. Thanks for the review!

>Ali: My dear Ali, I lost count of your enthusiastic reviews. Sorry for the delay, but I hope I made it worth your while. Thanks!

>White Hunter: I'm afraid there wasn't time for any interaction between themâ€| yet. But we'll bet to that, even if isn't in the middle of the battle. Thanks for reviewing!

>Lady MARSHMALLOW: Pretty please with a cherry on top! LOL!

Oh, you made me laugh so hard with that one. Thank you for your lovely review! I guess you can count on that. (If anybody else is reading this | interpret that last statement as you will. You'll know about Stoick's fate soon enough. ;))

>crazy one: Yeah, that would definitely be sooo badass. Although, with the (re-)introduction of the 'captain', it might make that a little difficult. Thanks for your review!

>Guest: THANK YOU! THANK YOU SO MUCH! Finally someone who gets it! And no, you didn't come across nasty; as you can see, I'm a bit intense, too. Thank you so much for reviewing!

>Guest: Thank you. I admit, those have been my exact same thoughts and the one thing keeping me from simply jumping the gun and drastically changing the story for months. It's good to know I'm not the only one who thought of it that way. Still, Stoick's fate has all but been decided | and I can't disclose that just yet. But thank you so much for your encouraging words and for reading this story! I look forward to hear more from you.

>Bigfan: It's so gratifying to read reviews such as yours. Thank you so much! I'm not sure I'd make a good director, but thanks anyway. And, are you some kind of mind reader? 'Cause I've got this little project I've been working on and | I can't say anything else about it for the moment. I've already said too much. Too many prying eyes, you know? Thanks for the review and the encouraging words! I hope I'll hear from you soon.

>PascalDragon: Yep, it was on purpose. Astrid's surprise will have to wait for now, I'm afraid. Thanks for reviewing, Sven!

>Hang Tuah: It's about mid- or late-17th century. And I am also a big fan of Hiccstrid, though I must admit I hadn't noticed those little details until you mentioned them. Thanks for your review!

>MysteryGirl7Freak: A blue box! Now THAT would be a massive plot twist, wouldn't it? It would be awesome, though. Who do you think would be the best Doctor to meet Elsa? (And just being curious here, which Doctor are you?) Thank you so much for your review!

>The great fan: Hehehe, I hope that didn't hurt. Thank you so much!

>GraceSophia: Please, don't let it be the last thing you do. Sorry for keeping you waiting for so long. I'll try to make up for it. And just so you know, you are one of a handful of people whose reviews also make me squeallike I'm going nuts. ;) Thank you soooooo much for them! Hope to hear from you soon!

>*_AlpacasRawesome_****_:**** I know, right? They deserve more time together! And don't worry, those two won't be separated ever again | I hope. Thanks for reviewing!

>Averant: True enough. I just thought it would add a little drama to the whole thing. I hope you don't mind. Thanks for reviewing!

>DR Lafrance: Thank you!

>*_Frozzmagic_****_:**** Oh, don't worry that much about your grammar; it's not my mother language either ;). Truth be told, I want to save the Bewilderbeast, too. And I can't see that ElsxaxEret pairing happening, either. It's just | too weird. Thank you for reviewing!

>SerenityQuill: Thank you so much! Do you like the battle so far?*

**I'm currently working on my second 'dialogue draft' for Chapter 21.

It might take me a while before I have a complete chapter ready to upload, so please be patient. Thank you.**

IMPORTANT! The poll will remain open for 7 more days. Last chance to cast your vote if you haven't already!

Don't forget to review on your way out!

P.S.: I'll fix any typos or 'holes' as soon as I finish translating/proofreading this chapter. I just couldn't wait to post it! Cheers!

EDIT: I've fixed the typos and mistakes, and I changed that little detail about Anna's hair color. Also, I forgot to mention that I took the name 'Thunderclaw' from the game Rise of Berk. Does anybody else play that game?

21. Fallen Alphas

A/N: Okay, first of all, I apologize for the long delay. Without going into details, I'll just say that it was really hard for me to get this chapter right. Mostly because I wanted to get the epic showdown between Elsa and our mystery captain right. I mean, the fight kinda wrote itselfâ€| at a snail's pace, but it wrote itself, I swear.

Anyway, I have some sad news to share with you, but I'll wait until you get to the end of the chapter to deliver them. Until then, enjoy!

* * *

><p>Any concerns Elsa had regarding the battle and her need to go back out there to help faded away, replaced by a single question. How could he be alive? How could he have tricked her into believing that he'd perished inside a cave deep in the forest far away from Arendelle? And why hadn't she kept searching for him after her Royal Guards found that rotting carcass all those years ago, especially when something deep inside her told her that it was all just too convenient?

But she had the answer for at least that last question. She hadn't kept searching because it was easier to believe that it was over, that the man who had threatened her kingdomâ€"and more importantly, the life of her sisterâ€"was no more. It allowed her to find peace of mind and to sleep at night.

And yet, here he was, very much aliveâ€"and once again, in control of the whole situation. More quickly than not he'd regained his authority and managed to bring order back to his crew. Some of them were now jumping inside the cargo hold to restrain the dragons at his command, while a couple more he'd beckoned approached her. They were carrying chains and a pair of shacklesâ€| the kind that she'd hoped she wouldn't see ever again.

"I'd been saving these for my second journey to Arendelle, but it seems the gods have finally favored me by bringing you here, away from the safety of your cozy little kingdom," he said as the two crewmen encased her hands with the shackles. They were obviously made

for her, just like the ones Hans had requested during his brief time in charge of her kingdom. There was no room to flex her fingers, let alone create a single snowflake.

Well, maybe that was what he probably thought. And that was exactly what she'd let him keep thinking for a while. Of course, she could breach the locks of the shackles from the inside with ice right there and then. But now that she knew who this man actually was, it changed everything. He was clever, probably more than any other soldier in this battle. And he knew her. He'd fought her. He probably expected her to try and free herself. This was like a game of chess, and right now, she needed to try and guess how many moves ahead he was seeing.

She'd wait for a more appropriate moment to break free. And then she would deal with him. She'd made a mistake by letting him go before. She wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

The two men behind her grabbed her by the arms and began dragging her away while the captain approached the cargo hold hatch. One of his crew members handed him a prod with a hook at one end. Knowing what he would surely do to the dragons with it was enough to test Elsa's resolve. Was she really willing to let those dragons be tortured even more? Could she stand idly while a mad man hurt these poor creatures?

She began freezing the shackles. _Of course I can't. And I won't._

Then she heard a high-pitched noise getting closer to the ship, followed by a loud roar. For a moment, Elsa wondered whether it would be her own dragon or Valka's son and his Night Fury coming to her rescue. A sudden explosion of ice gave the answer to that question. A mere second later, the Ice Fury landed at the bow with such force it rocked the ship. She whipped her tail and pushed a few crewmen off the ship, and she fired two more ice shots at a couple other men, freezing their feet.

Several more soldiers began surrounding the white dragon, but the captain ordered them to stop. Elsa turned to look at him and immediately discerned his intent. Already he had taken his helmet off and changed the prod from his right to the left, and now he was unsheathing his sword, a devilish grin drawn across his face.

"Make sure to chain her properly," he commanded the two men holding her then turned to face the Ice Fury. "I'll deal with her dragon."

Elsa couldn't help the sense of dÃ©jà -vu. Everything was transpiring the same way as that fateful night at her Ice Palace three years before. But unlike then, one thing was different this time: she was now in full control of her powers. And if ever there was a right time to unleash them, it was now.

She closed her eyes and visualized the lock mechanisms of the already half-frozen shackles, and then she filled them with an overwhelming amount of ice. She was rewarded with a loud _clack_, the sound of metal falling to the ground, and the feeling of air touching her skin. Then, barely when the two men were beginning to notice that she was free, she recreated her ice staff in her hands and twirled it

behind her back, hitting both of them squarely in the head and knocking them out. Finally, she used her staff to throw a bolt of ice magic at the prod the captain was holding, freezing it to the point where it shattered in his hands.

"This is between you and me," Elsa said firmly and decisively. "Leave her out of it!"

That caught the man's attention. He looked first at his now empty hand then at the metal shards on the floor. Then he turned around and stared at her, amazement etched in his eyes. Much to his credit, though, they didn't reflect any surprise, like he was expecting this. She'd made another move he'd anticipated, but she didn't mind. He wouldn't get the chance to claim the prize he'd been seeking for so long.

All she needed was an excuse, a single move from his part indicating that he would attack the white dragon nonetheless. Part of her wished he would. Instead, he smiled and bowed mockingly. "As you wish, Your Majesty."

He began walking slowly, circling her like a predator to its prey. He didn't take his eyes off her, and neither did Elsa. There was still a lot of movement all around them, but she didn't pay attention to any of it. Even the sound of the battle faded away. There was no black Bewilderbeast, no army of men and dragons, no Drago Bludvist. The real threat was right in front of her and he was still smiling. Why did he keep smiling so sardonically?

A sudden blast of ice next to her brought her back to the reality around them and then she realized why. Because I'm still playing into his hands.

He'd been distracting her, if only for a few moments, so that his men could capture the Ice Fury for him. From the corner of her eye, Elsa now noticed that Wintergale was completely surrounded by now, and it seemed like she'd just fired her last shot. All she had left to defend herself were her teeth and claws and whatever else she could use to keep the soldiers at bay.

The captain's smile kept growing wider. Elsa decided it was time to change that.

She reckoned where the crewmen were standing and how many of them there were, and with a single thought, she created a dense snowstorm which quickly divided itself into smaller flurries that surrounded each of them. Then, by simply blinking, she turned the swirling snowflakes into chains of solid ice that trapped them all in the act including the captain, whose hands she trapped inside a nice pair of custom-made shackles to get even.

And yet, while he and his men struggled to stay on their feet and get rid of their ice bindings, he kept smiling. "Seriously?" he scoffed. "Have you still not learned that no magic act of yours can truly stop me?"

Elsa raised an eyebrow. To be honest, she did hold out hope that an even tighter ice prison would stop him like the previous one hadn't. But if he had a way to free himself from anything she could throw at him, then there would be no point in trying to use her powers like

that. The only way to defeat him would be in actual hand-to-hand combat. Still, whatever amount of time she could buy until his escape, she'd take it, if only to make sure that her friend wouldn't be anywhere near that ship when push came to shove.

"I don't need to truly stop you," she said, looking him in the eye. "I just need to keep you busy long enough to finish what I came to do."

Having said that, she beckoned her winged friend with a simple eye motion, and without wasting another second, they both ran off and leapt into the cargo hold. Elsa was relieved to see that no soldier remained there, which meant that all of the people in the ship had gone after Wintergale and ended up in chains. The dragons seemed more trusting of her this time around, which made it easier for her to get closer to them, though she tried to do so as non-threateningly as possible nonetheless. She used the tip of her staff to freeze the chains of the first dragon she'd come across, and then she strode throughout the hold as quickly as possible to do the same with the chains of the other dragons.

Once she finished, she looked at Wintergale. It was time for the Ice Fury to work her own magic, but before that, Elsa needed to tell her some specific instructions.

"Okay, girl, listen to me very carefully," she said, kneeling in front of her dragon and caressing its head. "Once you tell these dragons to break free, I need you to lead them away from here on your own." The white dragon raised her ears in confusion at this statement, but Elsa continued. "Take them to the sanctuary and stay there with them until this is all over and under no circumstance come looking for me. Is that clear?"

Wintergale had begun shaking her head before Elsa had finished talking, and the young queen understood why. This wasn't something she would've preferred, either separating from her friend and sending her away, even if it was only for a few hours. It was nowhere near close to her original plan to bring the armored dragons to Valka so she and Cloudjumper could command them to do one thing or another against Drago's forces. But she couldn't just take off and let that man escape, not when he had so many things to answer for. And she wasn't about to put Wintergale in harm's way by having her stay.

And Wintergale understood this too, Elsa was sure. Thus, it only took the white dragon a few moments before she stopped shaking her head and crooned sadly.

"Good. And don't worry about me, okay? I'll be fine," Elsa reassured her as she stood up and out of her friend's way. "Now, come on, do your thing."

The Ice Fury nodded slowly, and with an authoritative yet gentle growl, she instructed the dragons to break their chains and follow her through the open hatch. They immediately did as they were told. Elsa smiled. She would never cease to be amazed by the respect Wintergale commanded and the way other dragons recognized her authority.

She followed the last dragon out the same way she'd exited the hold the first time by creating an ice pillar beneath her feet. The

moment she was outside, though, she jumped from the pillar to the deck to avoid being taken by surprise and knocked over again. She was pleased to see that the captain was still inside his ice shell and that his men were still trapped in chains. She looked up and was even more pleased to see that all of the armored dragons were now hovering behind Wintergale, just waiting for her to guide them home. The Ice Fury met her gaze one last time before flying away from the ship and to the safety of the sanctuary.

As Elsa watched them go, she caught a glimpse of the two Bewilderbeasts locked in combat. She had been hearing the sounds of their fight—ivory against ivory and heads bumping against each other—but hadn't really paid too much attention to it until now. The Alpha was pouring his heart and soul into the duel, but the dark challenger was quickly gaining the upper hand. Virtually everyone in the battlefield seemed to know how much was at stake here, as no dragon or man was fighting anymore against each other at this point. In fact, those soldiers who weren't still running away from the area the Bewilderbeasts were occupying were simply staring at the scene, with a horde of dragons flying over their heads but not attacking them.

Then something happened which Elsa had hoped wouldn't happen: the dark Bewilderbeast managed to get its tusks between the Alpha's neck and bowl him over. Her heart sank into her stomach when she heard the desperate cry of the mighty dragon—right before his opponent mercilessly pierced his underbelly.

An utter silence fell over the battlefield. The king had fallen.

Elsa took her mask off and tossed it aside, like in doing so the image she was seeing would change, but it didn't. She fell to her knees, tears welling up in her eyes. This was a serious blow to all of the free dragons, but to her, it was more than that. She felt like she'd lost a dear friend. That marvelous creature, whose kingdom she'd been living in and whose subjects she'd been learning from for the past three weeks, had welcomed her with open arms since day one, and he'd even treated her as an equal. She had grown used to the attentive and caring gaze with which he looked upon every living creature in the nest every day. How could she have taken the kind and benevolent king for granted so quickly? She'd come to believe that his reign would last for many more decades.

And yet, he now lay there, lifeless, at the feet of his adversary who even now was securing his position as the new Alpha with nothing more than a single roar.

Then she realized something else. She'd just sent Wintergale off to the sanctuary to keep her safe, but was there such thing as a safe place now? Almost every dragon, enslaved or free, was being drawn by the dark Bewilderbeast's call, no matter where they were. Even from inside the sanctuary, dozens upon dozens of dragons were either coming to kneel before their new Alpha or gathering above him. Filled with a sudden, powerful angst, she tried to find the Ice Fury among them. Part of her even felt tempted to call out her name, in the hopes that the white dragon would be able to resist the Alpha's influence if she heard her voice.

"Oh, that is so sad," the captain said behind her. "I expected more

from your Alpha, but he didn't even put up a fight. I guess he was just too old to keep up with the Dragon God's beast, eh?"

These words, followed by the sound of ice breaking, were enough to reignite a rage and hatred she hadn't felt in a long time. Three years, to be precise. For it reminded her that this man had once invaded her kingdom and threatened to kill her family, just like his 'master' had just invaded the domain of the kind Bewilderbeast and threatened to take his family. It also reminded her that she'd nearly died to protect everything she held dear back then—and that the dragon king had died doing the same. Valka had been right to believe that there would be bloodshed—and Elsa had failed to stop it.

No more. She would put an end to it once and for all.

Her armor and ice staff began glowing amber, just like the Heart of her Ice Palace. It was something that hadn't happened in a very long time, and it showed that she was losing the balance of her emotions. Love was fading from the mix, but she couldn't care less. This was no longer about protecting those she loved. This would be all about revenge, pure and simple. She would avenge the king's death, not by killing the dark Bewilderbeast but by eliminating his master—and anyone who would stand by him. Starting with this so-called captain.

Gripping her staff more tightly, she stood and spun around—but instead of a sword, she was met with a cloud of dust that got in her eyes, effectively blinding her. Unable to see what she was doing or where the captain was, she couldn't stop him from hitting her with what felt like the hilt of his sword. Between the force of the blow and the momentum of her first move, it was enough to send her to the floor a second time.

"Three years, and you're still the same weak and feeble queen I remember, using the same old tricks and pitifully taking part in a battle that is not hers," the man said haughtily. Elsa could hear his footsteps getting closer. "What will it take for you to understand that you're in over your head, Your Highness?"

Elsa couldn't reply or strike back. She had realized that what he'd thrown at her hadn't been dust but burning ash. The foreign particles behind her eyelids not only hurt but also stung, and even while the tears her body was producing were enough to quench them, the damage remained. She felt a pressing need to find water to rinse her eyes, but she couldn't as much as open them.

It wasn't her eyes that hurt the most, however, but her pride. In her haste to exact revenge on someone for the Bewilderbeast's death, she'd forgotten one important lesson Colonel Thorvald had taught her: never to let her feelings use her. For one moment, she'd lost all sense of self-control and she'd gotten carried away. And because of that mistake, she was now at the captain's mercy once again. Would her life be forfeit now?

She felt her staff being snatched from her hands. The sound of ice against metal and the sensation of tiny cold splinters falling on her face told her that the captain was trying to chop part of it off with a sword or a knife—without much success. "Although, I must say, this thing is impressive," he said, not a hint of sarcasm or mockery

in his voice. "There may still be hope for you as a warrior, after all."

Elsa opened her eyes in surprise at this apparent compliment—and immediately regretted it. They still hurt, and she couldn't see a thing anyway. She closed them again.

"I will make you an offer, and I believe it may be in your best interest to take it," he continued. "Surrender and join our cause willingly, bend the knee to Drago Bludvist, and your kingdom might be spared when he sets off to unify the rest of the world under his command. Or you can die, knowing that your family and everything you hold dear will most certainly perish by his hand—or by mine." Elsa heard as he walked away from her then returned dragging what sounded like chains. "You don't have to reply right now. A few days in the brig will give you plenty of time to think it over."

So, the captain wouldn't kill her just yet. He'd rather bring her to Drago so he could use her in his conquering campaign. In all likeness, he believed that he'd shatter her resolve for good by imprisoning her.

But he hadn't defeated her yet, and he never would. She would fight him with all her strength until he was the one on the floor, though she wouldn't make the same mistake of letting her feelings control her again. Instead, she would control her feelings just like she had done for three years—and let love, not fear or anger, drive her actions. Besides, she still had an ace up her sleeve which hopefully would be enough to take him by surprise.

Opening just one of her eyes ever so slightly, she noticed that the amber glow in her armor was gone. She had regained her emotional balance. Good. What she was about to do would require an impressive amount of it.

Before the captain got any closer with those chains, she began laughing softly. "Three years, and you are still the same cocky bastard who just loves to run his mouth," she told him as she leaned on the floor, pitifully trying to stand—or so it would seem. "And just so you know, this trick is new."

And without giving the captain a chance to react, she released hundreds of ice streams from her hands in every direction, covering the whole deck. Using her 'second eyes and ears', she immediately pinpointed where the captain was standing. She could even 'see' the outline of a raised eyebrow as he moved his head to look all around him. She also found her staff—leaning against a wall no less than 25 feet away from her. The man probably had left it there when he went for the chains.

It was time for her to make her move.

Using her arms to support her weight, she lifted both her legs and kicked the captain in the stomach as hard as she could. Combined with the element of surprise, it was enough to push him back and make him drop the chains. She stood as fast as she could, and taking advantage of the brief moment of confusion, she sprinted past him and made a beeline for her staff.

She hadn't given five steps in that direction, though, when she heard

the sound of chain links flying close to her. She was able to sense exactly where the captain wasâ€"close to the ship's main mastâ€"and how he was swinging them. She dodged the blow then turned around to grab the chains and encase them in enough ice to make them heavier and more difficult to handle. They fell to the ground with a loud _thud_, and she sensed that the captain had opted to drop them before the ice reached his fingers.

She also perceived a quick hand movement from his part, but it was _so quick_ she had no time to avoid the attack. Something hit her ice armor at full speed, and she felt a sharp and pointed object on her left shoulder. She let out a cry of pain, but it immediately became evident that it could've far worse. The small dagger had barely been able to pierce the sturdy ice, with only the tip stabbing her body. She _was_ injured, but it wasn't serious, and it wouldn't hinder her to keep fighting. However, she realized that she would be unable to reach her staff without turning her back to the captain and risking another surprise attack.

Oh, well, it's not like it's the only one I can make, she thought.

In fact, a new plan had begun forming her mind. The frozen chains at her feet might provide her with a unique opportunity to capture this manâ€"and to make sure that he'd stay captured. It would require a great deal of skill, but it was her best chance at beating him in his own game.

She still didn't dare open her eyes, but she didn't need to. Instead, she opted to remake her mask, going as far as to close the small gaps that would normally allow her to see through it, in order to avoid the temptation to use her natural sight. Facing the captain, who was now about ten feet away from her, she sensed that he was waiting for her to make the next move.

So be it, she thought. And with two quick movements of her hands, she shot two blasts of ice in the direction of the captain. With the same agility and speed as hers, he dodged them and threw another couple of daggers at her chest. She was already expecting that, and this time, she managed to avoid them by jumping and spinning in the airâ€"forming a new staff in her hands as she did. As she landed, she used it to fire two more blasts which the captain dodged again. In taking time to find another blade beneath his breastplate, however, he gave Elsa an opportunity to fire a third volley at his feet, making him jump.

She began circling the captain and getting closer to where he stood. All the while, for each knife and dagger threw, Elsa would jump or crouch to dodge them and counterattack two or three times to keep him busy, although he would always dodge the ice shots. Eventually, he ran out of small blades, at which point he unsheathed his sword and turned one last time to finally meet Elsa head-on. Instead, he nearly got his face skewered with a large ice spikeâ€"one of several that made up a large, circular barrier behind which he was now trapped. Much to Elsa's amusement, he began looking around frantically, trying not to get impaled on one of the spikes.

Elsa smirked. This man had seen before how each time she fired an ice blast, whether she missed her target or not, ice spikes would grow opposite of the direction from which the blast were fired. He

probably never expected it to happen the other way around. That, along with his persistence to injure her, had been what she'd been counting on. For as she circled the captain, each 'lousy' shot in reality had been intended to create that very barrier. And while she'd also expected him to use up every last one of his knives, it had been a relief to watch it happen just as the trap closed.

The captain was already trying to escape, breaking as many spikes as he could with each swing of his sword, only for more of them to take their place. The main mast—which also ended up inside the circle—didn't give him much space to work, either. Elsa wasn't finished yet, however. This was just phase one of her plan. Elsa wasn't exactly trying to keep the man away from her. As a matter of fact, the second phase would require close combat. And if they were to fight hand-to-hand, it would be under her own terms. The ice barrier would simply help towards that goal.

She used her staff as a pole to vault over both the spikes and the captain, landing right behind him. There was a clash of ice and metal as she swung her weapon to hit him and he spun around to block the attack, thus beginning the actual confrontation between the captain and the Snow Queen. Each of them tried to strike the other while dodging their respective opponent's blows, were it by jumping, leaning to the side, or crouching.

Elsa displayed an impressive mastery of her combat skills, on a par with the captain's own. And unlike the previous attempt that had gone awry, she remained calm and in absolute control of both her movements and her magic. The ice spikes were proof of the latter; whenever she came dangerously close to them, they would recede to give her room to move, while they would grow even more if it was the captain that came near the unnatural barrier, pushing him back towards the mast.

It wasn't long before the captain ran out of space to avoid Elsa's attacks. Then she hit the ground with the tip of her staff and used it to support her weight as she kicked him against the mast. Elsa grinned at the sight of the man trying to keep his footing. Now all the pieces were in place, and there was nothing the captain could do to stop her. Of course, he was too arrogant to admit it—or to go down without a fight. She was counting on it.

Just so, he raised the sword in his hand and tried to strike one more time, but Elsa already had formed her shield again to counter the attack. She used it to push the blade aside effortlessly and smack the man on the forehead as hard as she could. It wasn't enough to knock him out, but he seemed disoriented at best, barely able to hold the sword in his hand.

Knowing she had no time to waste, she twirled her staff once in order to hit the mast with the lower tip—revealing it to be fused with the chains that were now covered in a thinner layer of ice. The moment the links came into contact with the wood, she created a thick ring of ice to secure them to the wooden pole and separated them from her staff. Then she started drawing circles in the air with the tip of the staff. The ice-covered chains began moving as well, slithering quickly around the mast as they followed the commands of the Snow Queen. In less than five seconds, she finished chaining the captain with the very bindings he had intended to use on her. And as he recovered from the last blow and realized the predicament he now was in, Elsa could sense the arrogant smirk in his face finally fading

away.

At long last, it was her turn to smile widely. For once, she'd been able to fool the man who had been a step ahead ever since they'd met again during the battle. This was the culmination of the plan she'd hatched when she 'saw' the chains at her feet earlier. She had come to realize that, somehow, no ice bindings could restrain him for long. Perhaps he had a way to melt it from within. But surely he couldn't have anything that could help him break free from metal bindings.

In any case, and just to make sure that he wouldn't have anything to melt anymore, she thawed the thin layer of ice covering the metal links with one last swing of her weapon. Then she unmade the shield and the mask, turned her staff into a double-edged sword, and drew the tip close to the captain's throat. And to reply to the offer he'd proposed to her earlier, she said, "Is my answer clear enough?"

For a moment, Elsa thought she sensed a smirk forming on the captain's face before he spoke. "Go on, then. You know what you have to do. Finish it."

Elsa's grip around the hilt of her sword softened. Truth be told, part of her actually wanted to do exactly as this man asked. However, she'd already lost control once today, and she didn't want to go there a second time. Besides, what would Anna think of her if she took a person's life?

If she needed convincing, the captain's next words were nearly enough. "Finish it, or I swear I'll personally go after your sweet little sister," he taunted her, almost like he'd read her thoughts. "And, oh, the things I will do to herâ€¦"

Elsa pushed the blade a little bit harder against the man's neck. The sole mention of Anna and what he 'would do to her' brought back the memories of what this wretch had already done to her before. All in all, ridding the world of him couldn't be that bad, and if someone had to do it, it might as well be Elsa. Surely she could live with it. As for Anna, well, 'what you don't know won't hurt you', right? Although, come to think of it, Anna was very perceptiveâ€¦too perceptive, maybe. Eventually she would know that something about her older sister was different, that she had changed somehow. But maybe, just maybe, she would forgive her if she knewâ€¦

"Do it!" the captain dared her.

Elsa pushed the blade just a little further. A tiny drop of blood oozed from the captain's neck. What was she waiting for? Why was she so hesitant to end this? She was aware that, were it not for the fact that she could be of use to Drago Bludvist, this man would've already killed her without remorse. But now the tables were finally turned. She had the upper hand. Even the captain knew it. So why couldn't she just slit his throat?!

She sighed, a tear rolling down her cheek. Deep down, she knew perfectly well why. Anna had once put it in four simple words. And in spite of the distance between them both, Elsa could still hear her voice uttering them as clear as day: 'He's not worth it.'

And she was right. Up to this point, Elsa was still innocent of any

man's blood. Not even during the battle when she used her powers to fight Drago's army had she killed a single person. She knew that killing someone, no matter whom, would change her forever. Such were the principles and moral values with which she and Anna had been brought up by their parents, both before and after the incident. Not even this man was worth sacrificing all that.

She opened her eyes, finding that they no longer hurt, even though her vision was still somewhat blurry. She wanted to see the captain to the eye when she spoke her next words.

The ice blade turned to snow in her hand, snow that the wind took away. The captain saw it, and his smirk widened. "I knew it. For all your power and skills, you still aren't brave or smart enough. Mark my words: if you let me live, the blood of every single man, woman, child, _and_ dragon I kill from this moment on will also be in your hands."

Oh, she knew that. And there was no doubt that he did deserve to die. But he would certainly not die by her hand. Elsa would let justice take care of that.

"Say what you what. But I will not be like you," she replied, and gathering all the strength she could muster to speak the name she'd been trying to forget for a long time, she added, "Captain Sigurd, you are under arrest for your crimes against the crown. You shall be taken back to Arendelle, where you shall be duly tried and sentencedâ€" "

A sudden shriek interrupted herâ€"a loud, inhuman scream that echoed throughout the battlefield. Elsa fell silent. She recognized it. She'd heard it before while trying to free the dragons on this ship, albeit somewhat muffled by the many sounds of the battle raging outside. She turned around and saw the massive shape of the dark Bewilderbeast walking towards the apparent source of the sound. Could it be perhaps its master's call?

She formed a spyglass in her hands and aimed it at whatever the Bewilderbeast was following. Indeed, she saw the outline of a big man with long, black hairâ€"most likely the commander of this armyâ€"twirling what looked like a stick or a staff over his head as he screamed. He was definitely summoning the Alpha.

"I think my 'trial and sentence' can wait," Sigurd said behind her. He sounded amused, happy even. "Obviously I'm not going anywhere, so why don't you just sit and enjoy the spectacle that is about to take place?"

Why don't you keep your mouth shut? Elsa thought. She considered creating a sort of muzzle over Sigurd's mouth to keep him quietâ€"but the way he'd said those words, it was obvious that he knew something that she didn't. She turned back.

"Tell me what is happening," she commanded, although she didn't really expect him to talk. Other than his life or his freedomâ€"none of which he really seemed to care much aboutâ€"she had nothing to offer Sigurd.

To her surprise, he replied right away. "Drago Bludvist is calling upon his mighty beast to subdue a lesser dragon. There are few that

can resist the Alpha's first call, but in the end, they all break. It's a rather impressive thing to behold, the way a dragon becomes nothing more than a mindless animal and bends the knee to the Dragon God."

That was enough to send a chill down Elsa's spine. If there were any dragons that could resist the Alpha's call, they had to be the Riders' dragons. And if Drago was trying to bend one of themâ€"or all of themâ€"to his willâ€|

The shrieking stopped just as quickly as it had begun. Elsa turned around and aimed her spyglass again at the same spotâ€"and what she saw caused her heart to sink in her chest. There, standing right in front of Drago, were a skinny Viking and a black dragon.

Hiccup!

What was that stubborn kid doing? Did he still really believe that he could change Drago Bludvist's mind? And for that matter, how come Drago hadn't killed him yet? Unlessâ€| Of course, what better way to do so than to use the Viking's own dragon against him? Toothless was the dragon he wanted to subdue! And seeing as how there was apparently no one else close enough to help him, Hiccup would die if Elsa didn't get there to save himâ€"and fast.

There was only one slight complication. Elsa was too far away from the shore to be able to get there through normal means. Wintergale was gone, and whether she had been able to resist the Alpha's influence or not didn't really matter here. There was no guarantee that the Ice Fury would be able to hear Elsa calling out to her or even to come get her. And if that weren't enough, Elsa didn't want to leave Sigurd alone. Any of Drago's men could come to his aid and set him and his crew free as soon as she left.

Luckily, her powers and ingenuity provided her with a way to reach the shore quickly. It would be faster than running, probably even faster than flying. And as for her second problem, she'd just come up with a solution to it. She looked around to make sure that the rest of the crew was still tied at the bow section of the ship. After that, she created a large sphere that encased most of the mast Sigurd was chained to and covered itâ€"along with half of the ship, from there all the way to the sternâ€"with solid ice, as if it were an iceberg. She conjured large ice spikes to sprout from it to scare away anyone who might try to release the captain.

Satisfied, she jumped from the ship, landing feet first on the sea surfaceâ€"and freezing it all around the ship for good measure. Her sight was getting better by the minute, but even if it weren't so, the massive dark grey shape further away was impossible to miss. She calculated her trajectory so that she would arrive a little further away from where the Bewilderbeast and its master stood. Then she extended her hand, and a wide ice bridge appeared between her and the shore. She also added a pair of sturdy skating blades to her boots before crouching and leaning slightly forward. Finally, she thrust her arms backwards, opened her palms, and let loose a strong stream of ice magic from each hand to propel her.

She took off relatively fast, picking up speed within seconds. Soon she was traversing the bay faster than she probably would on

dragonback. Whether it would be fast enough, she was about to find out. Hopefully, Toothless would be able to withstand the Alpha's influence long enough.

Speaking of the massive dragon, she noticed that it was emitting a strange noise which became louder the closer she got to the source. However, by the time she reached the shore, it had diminished. Elsa feared the worst. Had the dark Bewilderbeast broken the Night Fury already? She looked to her right. About two hundred feet in that direction, the Alpha's master had started to walk away. Even further away, the gigantic sea creature seemed to be projecting itself onto another dragon, extending its wings and narrowing its eyes at something, but a large rocky outcrop and a fallen ice spike from the sanctuary's shell obscured the view.

That was when Elsa heard Hiccup telling someone to 'Stop!' and 'Snap out of it!' The fear and despair in his voice made it abundantly clear that Toothless had turned on him and that he was in big trouble. Elsa began running as fast as she could, weaving through broken traps and wrecked weapons along the way. All the while, she kept hearing Hiccup's terrified pleas to his dragon. Then a second, louder cry reached her ears.

"HICCUP!" That was the unmistakable voice of Stoick the Vast—and he sounded close by. But was he close enough?

She finally reached the corner of the outcrop, barely in time to find Toothless about to deliver a fatal blow to his best friend—and Stoick sprinting to get to his son before it was too late. Why Hiccup hadn't moved out of the Night Fury's line of fire was beyond Elsa, but it was obvious to her that if she didn't intervene within the next two seconds, either he or his father would inevitably die.

"SON!"

"Dad, no!"

Elsa had no time to think of a definite solution. Her instinct urged her to do something, anything, to avert the imminent tragedy. So she did the first thing that occurred to her: she shot a stream of ice magic between Hiccup and Toothless just as the latter fired on him—and as Stoick pushed his son out of harm's way.

But not even her magic was strong enough to suppress the powerful plasma blast of a Night Fury. A bright flash of light and a loud BOOM were the last things Elsa saw and heard before a large chunk of ice from the explosion hit her hard on the head, knocking her off for the third time this day. And this time, despite her best efforts, she was unable to stay conscious. She could only reopen her eyes one last, brief moment during which she caught a glimpse of the brawny Viking chief lying limp on the ground, covered in ice, and of his son and wife rushing to his side.

Just like the kind Bewilderbeast, Stoick the Vast had fallen.

That image stayed in Elsa's mind, along with that nagging sense of failure, right until nothingness claimed the Snow Queen of Arendelle.

* * *

><p>AN: Yeah, start playing "Stoick Saves Hiccup" and "Stoick's Ship" because I'm afraid this is how it ends. And by ends, I literally mean 'ends'. At least for a while.**

That's the news I needed to share with you. I'm shelving this little story for the next few months. Not because I've run out of inspiration or ideas. It's just that I still have this other shelved project called **_The Fifth Race's Reclaimers**_** (a HaloxStargate crossover; perhaps some of you have read it), and now that **_**Halo 5: Guardians**_** is a reality, I'd like to finish what I started and get ready for the sequel. Aside from that, I still need to dedicate myself to school and work and all that, which is part of the reason why it took me so long to update. I'm really sorry to have to put this story on hiatus like this. I know it's a sad ending, but that's how it's supposed to be.**

**ArmyWife22079:**** I'm afraid it was neither. Sorry.

>_**Aniul6:**_** And you were right all along. Thanks for reviewing! I hope you liked this chapter.

>_**GraceSophia:**_** A year already?! My, time does fly. Once more, I loved your extensive analysis of the previous chapter, as well as your funny comments and occasional rants. Just, please, don't cry for Stoick. Thanks for reviewing! (And yes, I am aware that it's been waaaay too long since that last e-mail. I promise I'll write you a reply within the week.)

>_**MysteryGirl7Freak:**_** Thank you so much for your review! I so enjoy your reactions to each update, and learning that you'd be the perfect companion for the Doctorâ€¦ at least for a week :P. I'm sorry this is what the drums of war brought. But don't cry, Stoick is now at peace. As for how Sigurd survived the first time, you'll get to know that when I 'come back'. ;)

>_**PascalDragon:**_** I guess in the end, Hiccup had to be shown who it was with the ice powers. And yeah, Sigurd was indeed the reason why Drago and his army knew of her. Thanks for reviewing, Sven! (P.S.: As you may already know, I LOVED your crossover. I still owe you a couple of reviews for your latest chapters. Will you update soon?)

>_**Bteam:**_** Oh, yes, it was him!

>_**Guest:**_** Thank you! Yeah, I guess I just couldn't avert Stoick's death after all. Now we'll just have to see how the story develops from here.

>_**Ali:**_** Once more, thank you for all of your reviews. I enjoy your eagerness, and it actually works as a reminder for me to keep writing. Just remember, I'm going to be away from this story for a few months, so this time, I'm afraid you'll have to wait a while longer. But I hope to see you next time I upload a new chapter! Thanks again!

>_**Ghost:**_** Yeah, there will be a kind of epilogue, but it will come after a few chapters with [SPOILER ALERT] Hiccup in Arendelle and Elsa's reunion with Anna. Thank you for reviewing!

>_**Frozzmagic:**_** Ups, not Hans, I'm afraid. Thank you for your review!

>_**icecrystal1999:**_** My friend, I like the way you think. Thank you for the feedback and advice regarding Stoick's fate. Also, your extensive analysis on future events helped me gain some perspective (and ideas!) I sorely needed for the last part of this story. So, from the bottom of my heart, thank you! And I look forward to hear more from you.

>_** 212:**_** At this point, it's still unclear whether Wintergale was controlled or not. And to be honest, I'd like to keep that one as a surprise for when I return. Thanks for your review!

>_**Guest Dragon:**_** Thanks for reviewing! Yeah, she's being a bit condescending with Hiccup. I know her comment about his 'stubbornness' when he tried to convince Drago was good enough. If not, there will still be other comments from her on that regard later on. And don't worry, you' didn't. ;)

>_**White Hunter:**_** Yes, you got it right! Well done! I hope this chapter was to your liking, despite the sad ending. Thanks for reviewing!

>_**Saber The F4U Corsair:**_** Nope, not Hans. Sorry. Thanks for your review!

>_**Guest:**_** Thank you so much for your kind words! I'm glad you like the story so far, especially that chapter with Stoick and Valka. Hope to hear more from you!**

I feel like I'm missing reviewers. Most of the reviews for Chapter 20 were from either Ali or Guest Dragon. Are you guys still with me? I miss you all!

The poll is obviously closed at this point. The results should be on my profile page. Please don't cry too much. Stoick died a heroic death, and it was for the noblest cause there can beâ€”saving the life of a loved one. We will all remember him, 'hear his name rise from the depths of Valhalla, and know that he's taken his rightful place at the table of kings'. R.I.P. Stoick. :'(

I'll see you when I see you, guys.

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***dramatic chorus appears and sings* WAIT! THERE IS MORE! SHIA SURPRISE!**

Sorry, I couldn't help that. :P But please tell me you didn't seriously believe I'd leave this chapter like this when I'm about to leave this story on hiatus. So, yeah, this chapter isn't over yet. Enjoy!

(And if you didn't get the reference, feel free to Google it as 'shia labeouf song' ;).)

* * *

><p>Elsa woke up at dawn on a rather chilly summer day. For someone who wasn't bothered by the cold, the fact that she could feel it in her bones was saying something. The funny thing was, the weather wasn't any different today than it had been since the day of the big storm four days before—and thus far, it hadn't been a problem to her. So, what had changed?<p>

The answer would come sooner than she expected, heralded by a soft knock on her door.

"Princess Elsa?" It was Kai, the Royal Family's friend and chief servant—and he sounded distressed. Since she didn't spend much time around people, Elsa had learned in her ten years of isolation to 'read' other people's feelings simply by listening to their voices, no matter how many or how few words they used. Her first thought was that something had transpired in town that could require her presence—which was completely out of the question, especially if things escalated to a point where she couldn't handle the stress. Her gloves could only do so much.

"What is it, Kai?" she replied behind the door, hoping it would be something less severe.

"I'm afraid I bring terrible news. The King and Queen—" His voice quivered. "The remains of their ship were found last night in open waters by a merchant vessel, and—I'm sorry, Princess. It appears as though there were no survivors."

Elsa stood there for a few moments, unable to speak. The remains of her parents' ship? No survivors? Did that mean—? No, she didn't even want to consider the meaning of that statement. A sinking feeling expanded in the pit of her stomach as she became filled by a sense of dread. Kai continued talking, but his voice became a distant murmur. Whatever he was trying to tell her, it couldn't be what she feared it was. She refused to believe that it was what she feared it was.

But her subconscious mind understood it perfectly—and it showed in her powers. A cold chill swept through the bedroom, quickly becoming a small blizzard that began freezing everything in the room. She couldn't remain standing anymore. Turning her back to the door, she leaned against it and slid slowly until she was sitting on the floor. Covering her face with her hands, she wailed at the top of her voice, tears streaming down her cheeks. Bursts of ice magic shot out around her. Frost covered the floor and crept up the walls of her bedroom in an instant—and the small storm suddenly stopped, every last snowflake freezing in place, neither falling nor rising.

"Princess Elsa?!" she heard Gerda's voice outside the room. "Princess Elsa, are you alright?!"

"Leave me alone!" she yelled. She couldn't—she wouldn't—move from there. She buried her face in her knees and lay there like that for hours, crying and wailing until her tears ran out. She kept wondering whether she could've done anything to save them had she

been on that ship with them, even though she knew that she would've only made things worse. Regardless, it was easier to think of several ways in which she could've prevented their demise than to accept that they were gone forever.

She couldn't even repeat the words her father had taught her. They felt so pointless right now. She was alone in her bedroom, and all she wanted to do was to let her feelings out, not to 'conceal it, don't feel it'. What would happen to Anna and her now? What were they going to do? What was she going to do without them there to help her, without their loving support and understanding?

"Momâ€¦" she sobbed softly, her throat hoarse after all that time crying. "Dadâ€¦"

â€¦

"_Dad!" â€¦ "No, get away from him!" â€¦ "Go on, get out of here! Get away!"_

Amidst her own weeping, Elsa could hear the distant cacophony of cheering soldiers and enslaved dragonsâ€¦and the cries of a young Viking mourning the death of his father.

Somehow, the latterâ€¦as well as the loud roar of a Bewilderbeast summoning every dragon in the region, including any that could've resisted his first callâ€¦was enough to break the darkness surrounding her and bring her back to the here and now.

She shook her head and stood up, but she felt extremely dizzy, and after only two steps forward, she stumbled and fell. She was forced to make her staff again so she could use it as a crutch. She walked slowly towards a small gathering of Vikings, including Hiccup and Valka, all of them with grim expressions on their faces. Anyone who saw them could've thought these people were at a funeralâ€¦and they couldn't have been more right. For they were all gathered around the lifeless body of their leader, their chieftainâ€¦the woman's husbandâ€¦the boy's father.

All at once, the same emotions and feelings of defeat and failure she'd felt before losing consciousness came flooding back. She had sworn to Valka that she would protect her dragons, and she had sworn to herself that she would keep the Vikings safe, especially Hiccup. In the end, she had failed to do both. Valka's Bewilderbeast was dead, and without him, the rest of the free dragons had no way to escape from the dark Alpha's control. The riders' dragons were nowhere to be seen, so it stood to reason that it had taken them as well. Had it not been for Stoick's sacrifice, his son would've died as well. And it was all her fault for not staying by their side.

Oh, why had she been so hell-bent on defeating Sigurd? She should've fled that ship the moment she saw Drago's Bewilderbeast coming out of the water. She had ice magic strong enough to help the good Alpha fight him, for God's sake! They could've defeated him together! She could've dealt with Sigurd later on! But no, she had to stay there to settle the score once more, to prove that she was still stronger and smarter than him. What hubris!

It was all her faultâ€¦

"Come on!" she heard someone call out loud authoritatively, coupled with the heart-rending bellow of a dragon in pain. Every enemy soldier, as well as the Vikings and Elsa, turned to see the man who had spoken. For Elsa, this was the first time she saw this man up close. He had an intimidating build, his face covered in scars, his long hair and beard arranged in messy locks. He held in his hand what looked like an oversized elephant goad. This was Drago Bludvist, the so-called 'Dragon God'. And he was mounted on Toothless' back! Of all the dragons he'd just enslaved, he'd chosen to add insult to injury by riding the dragon of the one person who had believed that he could change his mind about dragons.

Elsa felt that same rage she'd felt when facing Sigurd building up inside of her anew. But this time, instead of amber, her staff gave off an even brighter blue glow, almost white in color. She had learned her lesson with Sigurd at least, and she would not lose her temper again. But she would stop this man just like she'd stopped Sigurd, even if it was the last thing she did.

"Gather the men, andâ€¦" Drago began, surveying the battlefield, but he paused when he saw Elsa. The latter stared him down, challenging himâ€¦and in return, she was met with a terrified expression from his part as he mouthed one single word. "Youâ€¦"

He knew who she wasâ€¦and he was actually afraid of her! The imposing commander of the army of men and dragons feared her as much as any of his men! He'd probably heard the same stories about the 'Ice Sorceress'â€¦which she now suspected had been thanks in no small part to Sigurdâ€¦and he probably knew that she alone posed as much of a threat to his reign of terror as the good Alpha and the free dragons.

"Toothless!"

Out of the corner of her eye, Elsa saw Hiccup standing up and running towards Drago, and Valka trying to stop him. Drago also took notice of this, and as if pulled out of a trance, he recovered his menacing attitude. He raised his goad then aimed it at Elsa and the Vikingsâ€¦

Elsa suddenly realized that she had forgotten about Drago's secret weaponâ€¦the subservient Bewilderbeast. She caught a glimpse of the massive sea dragon taking a deep breath and unleashing his devastating attack, but the Alpha was a lot farther away than its master, and the stream of freezing water hit the ground a good distance from the riders. Even though it kept advancing towards the dragon riders at a fast rate, the gap provided Elsa with enough time to counter the attack.

She raised her own staff and twirled it thrice over her head before driving it into the snow. This movement caused a strong, icy wind to blow around the riders, creating an air bubble that acted as a barrier to impede the advance of the stream and divert it to each side. Only a few drops of water were able to break through the air shield, freezing before they fell to the ground. The rest froze as well around the rushing wind, forming a perfect sphere inside which the dragon riders remained untouched, and which would appear outwardly as part of the frozen stream, spikes and all.

Despite this act taking little effort, Elsa had to lean on her staff

to rest once the huge dome finished taking shape and the wind ceased blowing. She stood there and waited a few minutes before walking up to the ice. She touched it with the tip of her fingers and used her magical sixth sense to hear Drago ordering his troops to regroup and meet him at Berk. She was also able to see him flying away, followed by his Bewilderbeast and the enslaved dragons.

"I think we're safe, for now," she told the Vikings in a whisper.

Needless to say, her intervention had earned her several puzzled looks, which she'd expected would happen anyway. But nothing prepared her for the pained stare she got from Hiccup when she turned around. His face displayed a mixture of emotions, from confusion to anger to helplessness to grief, but mostly, he looked betrayed. That only served to make her feel worse for keeping her powers a secret from him. Valka had been the one to ask that of her, but it didn't make it any easier.

"Thank you, Elsa," Valka finally said, breaking the awkward silence that had settled inside the impromptu shelter. "I believe it would be best if we stay in here for a while, just in case. Then we'll—" Her voice quivered as she looked back. "We'll need to get ready to—"

She couldn't continue. It was evident that she was trying to repress the sobs, to stay strong for Hiccup. The young Viking, however, could no longer hold back. He fell to his knees, covering his face with his hands, and he wailed at the top of his voice, tears streaming down his cheeks. His mother knelt by his side, surrounding him with her arms to comfort him in as much as possible. The rest of the Vikings just stood in silence around their fallen chief, all toughness and serenity as they paid their last respects—"except for the blonde girl with the braided hair, who did sob quietly and shed a tear from time to time.

As for Elsa, who had only known Valka's husband for a very short time, all she could think of was Hiccup. She could relate to him in almost every way. She too had lost her parents, after all. But unlike them, who had perished because of a natural disaster, the boy had just lost his father because of her actions, because of her stubbornness to deal with an old enemy who wasn't even important in the grand scheme of things. This time around, she _could've_ done something—

She looked at Stoick's lifeless body. The man had just found his wife after 20 years of believing her dead. He had proposed a second time to her in the hopes that his family could be together once more. And now, _he_ was gone, and his dreams of a happy family with him.

Elsa looked down in shame for a moment—and then she lifted her head, a fierce determination in her eyes. _That's not good enough,_ she thought as she walked towards the small group of riders with a renewed resolution. She wouldn't let a woman lose her husband. She wouldn't let a boy lose his father. Not today.

"Not if I have a say in it," she thought out loud, making her way to where Stoick lay and kneeling beside him. She saw a fist-sized gaping hole in his chest that went all the way through to his back. No wonder the blast had also shattered the ice wall behind him. But if

she reckoned correctly, the plasma blast had missed his heart only by a hair's breadth. _Good._

"Elsa?" Valka asked as she approached her, Hiccup trailing behind his mother. "What are youâ€"?"

"There might be a way to save him," Elsa said with as much certainty as she could. That earned her several wondering looks from everyone around her, including Valka. "If I freeze his heart, I mightâ€" "

"Freeze his heart?!" Valka exclaimed. "Like you did Anna? How would that help?"

"Look, there's no time to explain," Elsa said firmly. "I need you to trust me on this, okay?"

Valka hesitated, while the rest of the riders just looked at each other and Hiccup stared at her as if she were insane or something like that. Truth be told, her plan _was_ insane. It hinged on a completely absurd theory she had come up with a while back but which she had been unable to proveâ€"until now. But it was the only thing she had.

"Are you sure of this, Elsa?" Valka asked her with a quivery voice.

Elsa looked at her hands then at Stoick. "No, but I think we've got nothing to lose at this point." Valka didn't seem convinced or pleased by this answer. "Please, at least let me try."

Valka seemed to ponder it for a moment. Then she gave an almost imperceptible nod and stood to face the rest of the Vikings. "Everyone, step aside," she commanded. "Give her some space."

None of them moved at first, so Valka had to raise her arms and push them back while Elsa prepared herself to carry out her plan. Hiccup, however, was adamant to let his father alone with her. He tried to get past his mother with the apparent intention of shoving Elsa aside, but Gobber managed to grab him by both arms and kept him restrained, even though the older Viking himself didn't seem too comfortable about this whole thing.

Meanwhile, Elsa kept working on setting everything up, starting with a simple ice bed that she created underneath Stoick, slowly lifting him above the ground. She tore a piece of cloth from her cape and used it to make a pillow upon which the Viking chief could rest his head. She wanted to be sure that he would be comfortable whenâ€" or _if_â€" he woke up.

Finally, she put one hand over the wound and the other on his chest, right above his heart. She closed her eyes and focused her mind and feelings on one single thing: bringing this family back together. Ice magic began building up in her palms, glowing brighter and brighter by the second. Then, before anyone could as much as blink, she released it into Stoick's body. The force of her magic coursing through his chest caused it to convulse violently for a moment before it settled down again.

"DAD!" Hiccup cried, trying to break free from Gobber's grasp.

Elsa took a hand to her head as she stepped back. She was feeling dizzy again, more than before. The strain had been simply too much, but she still made an effort to remain standing a while longer. She needed to know if her plan had worked.

For several minutes, nothing happened. But just when she began wondering if it had all been in vain, a flurry of shining snowflakes started to come out of Stoick's wound. Seeing in them a glimmer of hope, Elsa leaned forward to peek inside the gruesome hole in the Viking's chest. Much to her surprise, she found that her magic was mending the damage left by the shot, one snowflake at a time. Scorched organs slowly recovered their shape. Severed veins and arteries became linked by transparent blue canals. Bones, muscles, and skin grew back in ice form.

By the time her magic had sealed the wound and repaired Stoick's body, though, Elsa had run out of strength. Her knees buckled, and she fell to the ground. She was exhausted from her previous fight against Sigurd and all the beating she had endured, but still she refused to give in. She needed to know that her magic had done more than filling a gap. She touched the base of the bedâ€” and her fingertips were met with the sensation of a faint heartbeat against the iceâ€”a heartbeat that grew stronger by the second. She also heard when he opened his mouth and inhaled deeply, filling his lungs with as much air as he could. That brought a smile to her face. It had worked.

Stoick the Vast was alive.

Every voice and gasp and exclamation of surprise faded in the background. Despite all her failures and mistakes of the day, this was a huge success, perhaps the greatest success she'd ever had. She'd saved a life. She'd kept a family together. These pleasant thoughts accompanied her as she finally, willingly embraced the blissful peace that came with unconsciousness.

* * *

><p>AN: This is the true ending of this chapter, I swear. Would you be surprised to know that this is the longest chapter I've wrote for this story (and possibly the longest I've **_**ever**_** wrote)? I hope you liked it.**

So, yeah, Stoick gets to live after all, though he **_was**_** dead for a short while. Now, can you guess how **_**exactly**_** Elsa's magic was able to bring him back? Let the theories begin raining down!**

Okay, now is when I say goodbye for good. If there are any typos left in this chapter, I promise I'll come back and fix them soon. I'll be back with you in a few months. Don't forget to review on your way out!

End
file.